

ROUTLEDGE INNOVATIONS IN POLITICAL THEORY

Democracy, Dialectics, and Difference

Hegel, Marx, and 21st Century
Social Movements

Brian C. Lovato



Democracy, Dialectics, and Difference

It has been nearly two centuries since Marx famously turned Hegel on his head in order to repurpose dialectics as a revolutionary way of thinking about the internal contradictions of our social relations. Despite critiques from post-structuralists, postcolonialists, and others, there has been a resurgence of dialectical thought among political theorists as of late. This resurgence has coincided with a rise in the mention of words like class warfare, socialism, and communism among the general public on the streets of Seattle in 1999, in Cairo's Tahrir Square, in the actions of the Greek anarchists and the Spanish indignados, in the rallying cry of "we are the 99%" of the Occupy Movement, and in academia. This book explores how dialectical thought might respond to the critiques brought forth by those on the left who are critical of Marxism's universalizing and authoritarian legacy.

Brian C. Lovato singles out Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe as the key interlocutors in this ongoing conversation between Marxism and post-structuralism. Laclau and Mouffe argue that Marxist theory is inherently authoritarian, cannot escape a class-reductionist theory of revolutionary subjectivity, and is bound by a closed Hegelian ontology. Lovato argues the opposite by turning to two heterodox Marxist thinkers, Raya Dunayevskaya and C.L.R. James, in order to construct a radically democratic, dynamic, and open conceptualization of dialectical thought. In doing so, he advances a vision of Marxist theory that might serve as a resource to scholars and activists committed not only to combatting capitalism but also to fighting against colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity. The writings of Dunayevskaya and James allow for Marxism to become relevant again in these tumultuous early years of the 21st century.

Brian C. Lovato is a political theorist and labor organizer currently based in California. His research draws on Marxist, classical anarchist, post-structuralist, and decolonial thought in order to better understand social movements and the way they engage issues of race, class, and gender.

Dialectical theories are back on the agenda, and in *Democracy, Dialectics, and Difference*, Lovato makes a significant contribution to the revitalization of a tradition that is not only dialectical, but also decolonial.

George Ciccariello-Maher, *Drexel University, USA*

For several decades now, the long shadow of Laclau and Mouffe have linked Marxism to authoritarianism and essentialism. Despite spirited rejections of this view, there remains a kind of orthodoxy based on their view that Marxism inevitably diminishes popular involvement and maximizes centralized authority structures as it is practiced. Brian Lovato challenges this view in his fresh and insightful take on the legacy of Marxism. He turns to several non canonical or even anti-canonical figures in doing so: Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James and Cornelius Castoriadis. Reading Dunayevskaya in particular as one who recognized an alternative and far more contingent and populist version of Marxism, Lovato shows that Lenin himself can be reread as anticipating and seeking an alternative form of Marxism that negates the kinds of critiques that Laclau and Mouffe will ascribe to it. This book will reenergize those who seek to turn to Marx (and Lenin too) insofar as it demonstrates that the baggage that is often associated with Marxism need not stem from Marx himself—and not always from the practices of marxism either—but rather comes from various discourses that presume a kind of fatal flaw in marxism that leftists must therefore avoid ever after.

James Martel, *San Francisco State University, USA*

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1 Introduction

The early 21st century has found the Marxist left in an odd position. The end of the previous century ushered in an era of increased economic liberalization and democratization. For many in the public sphere, this signaled the end of a nearly century long experiment with socialism and the beginning of a golden age of prosperity and freedom. Even so, many have remained skeptical of the promises of this new era. These skepticisms have manifested themselves in the Los Angeles riots of 1992, the Chiapas uprising of 1993, the anti-WTO protests in Seattle of 1999, the factory occupations in Argentina of 2001, the riots that have torn through Greece in recent years, and most recently in the Arab Spring and Occupy movements. Furthermore, in the face of a continuing deep economic crisis, there are those on the right whose reservations about unchecked global capitalism are growing stronger on a daily basis. It is in this context that thinkers on the left must ask what the proper response to this situation (in which the salvific promise of liberal democracy and global capitalism appears to be further and further from fulfillment with each passing moment) is. This question is even more pressing for those scholars, myself included, who find themselves at the crossroads of activism and academia.

While glad to be free of the totalitarian excesses of the Soviet Union, many academic intellectuals, especially those on the left, remain wary of the promises made by the newly crowned liberal order. While the influence of Marxism has diminished in the academy, this has not meant a celebration of liberal democratic capitalism. Post-structuralists have argued that liberal society itself is just as involved with oppressive webs of power as its more explicitly oppressive counterparts; civic republicans and radical democrats criticize the lack of deep democracy under liberal regimes. Meanwhile, Marxism and Marxist-influenced thought has not disappeared and since 1999 is even experiencing a resurgence of sorts—often tinged with elements of post-structuralism, psychoanalysis, or other fashionable theoretical approaches that are usually located at the margins of academic discussions.¹

2 Introduction

Thinkers like Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have attempted to move beyond the structuralist Marxist critiques of capitalism by examining the discursive practices that create and recreate domination. While this work is important, it often leaves the reader feeling powerless in the face of a radically contingent reality. Others have turned to the realm of democratic theory. Thinkers like William Connolly and those using the work of Hannah Arendt today might all fall under this broad umbrella. This type of work is essential to the understanding of what it means to be political, yet it often remains entrenched within a capitalist framework despite being critical of the effects.² Finally, some academics have made an explicit return to the Marxist critique of capitalism. Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, John Holloway, and Moishe Postone have recently engaged in such a project (while incorporating elements of other traditions). More recently, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, and Jodi Dean, among others, have—perhaps in an act of deliberate contrarianism—turned directly to the idea of communism with all of its historical baggage. All of these thinkers have gone about presenting a Marxist analysis for the 21st century by critically engaging both capitalism as it exists today as well as Marx's thought itself. It is in the spirit of this third approach that this book takes shape.

There are a handful of reasons for engaging in such a project. First, capitalism remains a powerful and alienating force in the world today. This fact seems to become more and more obvious with each passing day. Second, Marxism, at one time *the* critique of capitalist economics and ideology, still serves as a point of reference even for those who claim to have moved beyond it. Third, recent attempts to provide a critical analysis of the existing world order have either avoided the problem of capitalism (as is the case in much of the democratic theory literature) or, when they do engage with it, failed to offer up a preferable alternative (as is the case in much of post-structuralism—especially those elements influenced by Foucault).³ Given these three claims, it seems reasonable to reengage and reinvigorate the Marxist tradition itself.

Such an attempt at reinvigoration necessarily must respond to the critiques of Marxism put forth by the alternative approaches of critical analysis. For the purpose at hand, the post-Marxist critique offered in Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is taken to represent the most pressing and cogent criticism of Marxism in recent decades. Laclau and Mouffe criticize Marxism for resorting to class reductionism, vulgar materialism, and an inherently authoritarian conception of politics. This book responds to these critiques by arguing for a Marxism that offers up radically democratic, libertarian politics grounded in Hegelian thought and an anti-essentialist understanding of the revolutionary subject.⁴ Each of

these qualities will be unpacked in its respective place within the text; it is now critical to turn to the debates that make such an argument necessary.

The Moment of Laclau and Mouffe

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe started a conversation that has lasted nearly three decades when they first published *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* in 1985. Drawing on thinkers like Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Michel Foucault, Laclau and Mouffe attempt to construct a genealogy of the Marxist tradition in order to uncover its internal contradictions and to argue for their own post-Marxist conception of radical democratic practice. In doing so, Laclau and Mouffe reject the traditional Marxist emphasis on class as the primary determinant of political activity, agency, and allegiance. Laclau and Mouffe envision themselves as responding to three key failures of Marxism: first, the issue of class essentialism; second, crude materialism as an explanation for all human activity; and third, an inner kernel of totalitarianism they see as present in Marxism from the very beginning.

Despite its age, Laclau and Mouffe's book still stands as a representation of a general sentiment toward and movement away from Marxism during the 1980s. That is, it demonstrates the attitude toward Marxism held by many intellectuals in the years prior to and after the fall of the Soviet Union. One can trace the trajectory of the movement away from Marxism beginning with the aftermath of 1968 and moving toward the eventual dissolution of the Soviet Union and its satellite states. In this sense, Laclau and Mouffe stand as one moment among many (e.g., the Polish Solidarność movement, the tragic results of the Iranian revolution, etc.); however, they are representative of this movement and offer perhaps the strongest critique of Marxism from the left. While it may be true that there never was a strong Marxist sentiment in the American academy, the appearance of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* served to further close off this community from Marxian discourse. Also, it offered an alternative radical theory to American leftists already skeptical of Marxism.⁵ Furthermore, there has been little, if any, work done to offer up a distinctly Marxist alternative to Laclau and Mouffe's conception of radical and contingent democracy.⁶ Given this situation, it seems that it may in fact be appropriate to take up the challenge presented by Laclau and Mouffe once again in order to both better understand what they have to say and to provide an adequate response to one of the strongest criticisms of the Marxist paradigm.

Laclau and Mouffe begin this work by tracing the concept of hegemony from its origins in the crisis of Marxism at the turn of the 20th century. Both Laclau and Mouffe trace their own intellectual origins to Althusser's

4 *Introduction*

brand of structural Marxism, and this is evident in the view of the Marxist tradition that they present in these chapters.⁷ By downplaying, and nearly altogether avoiding, the Hegelian aspects of Marx's own thought, as well as within post-Marx Marxism, Laclau and Mouffe construct a particular vision of a Marxist tradition constantly grappling with the problem of class fragmentation. This is not to say that the problem of fragmentation was and is not a real one for Marxist theorists, and anti-capitalists more generally; however, the way in which the authors set up the problem relies upon their intention to highlight a particular form of diversity within various Marxist traditions—perhaps at the cost of providing a coherent image of the Marxist tradition (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 4).

In carrying out this exercise, Laclau and Mouffe offer up the three criticisms, mentioned at the beginning of this discussion, against the Marxist tradition as they see it. First, from Luxemburg to Gramsci, despite any partial advances these thinkers make, Marxism appears to depend upon class reductionism and class essentialism. That is, in all cases, even under the most progressive conceptions of hegemonic practice, ultimately there is a class basis to all political activity.⁸ Laclau and Mouffe can see no reason for this class basis beyond a logical necessity inherent in Marxism itself. The second charge involves a crude materialist conception of history. This is connected to the charge of class essentialism but differs in key ways. To characterize Marxism as a crude materialism is to argue that Marxism claims that material factors determine ideological factors in all instances. Furthermore, this means that an unwavering base–superstructure distinction holds at all times in all contexts. This type of materialism can take the form of class essentialism, but it also has ramifications for more nuanced discussions of ideology (as present in two of Laclau and Mouffe's mentors, Gramsci and Althusser). Finally, the charge of an inner kernel of authoritarianism can be seen in Laclau and Mouffe's discussion of pre-Gramscian Marxism. While this authoritarianism becomes most explicit in the Leninist conception of hegemony, dependent on an external relationship to the working class through a vanguard party, it is also present in the forward-looking orthodoxy of Kautsky and even the revisionism of Bernstein. As was mentioned above, these charges are serious and do in fact carry a great deal of weight; however, part of the reason for this can be found in the particular form of the Marxist tradition that Laclau and Mouffe choose as a target. It will be argued below that the work of Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis avoid these problems and represent alternatives to both this faulty form of Marxism and the post-Marxist position of Laclau and Mouffe. However, even if their charges against the Marxist tradition as a whole may not hold up, there is no reason to dismiss Laclau and Mouffe's project in its entirety.

Thus, it is now essential to turn to Laclau and Mouffe's own conception of the antagonistic nature of social relationships and radical democracy.

The final two chapters of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* lead to an insistence upon a radically contingent politics based on the notion of antagonisms. Antagonisms result from a confrontation with the Other in which the subject can no longer fully be itself—Laclau and Mouffe argue that this arises due to the impossibility of totalities (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 125).⁹ Indeed, antagonisms represent the limits or frontiers of any given subject position. This idea of the frontier and of the impossibility of closed totalities leads back to the Gramscian conception of hegemony in which various subject positions are linked through articulating practices, but none of these linkages or positions are viewed as necessary, essential, or foundational. It is from this ground that Laclau and Mouffe construct their vision of radical democracy in a social universe based upon contingency and discursive construction of subject positions. They look to the new social movements outside of traditional labor movements as examples of democratic struggles not grounded upon essentialist notions. Laclau and Mouffe recognize in these movements the articulation and diffusion of conflict to an ever greater number of relations. They claim that this represents both a qualitative change in the social relations themselves and an expansion of the democratic imaginary into other fields of social reality (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 159–161). Furthermore, the claim is made that this highlights the crisis of any concept of a unitary political subject, especially one bound up with a necessary class character.

This leads into what they call a radical and plural conceptualization of democracy. Within this radically plural field of political action, they argue that there are no necessary links between struggles (they use the examples of anti-capitalism and anti-sexism), and these struggles can be linked using a hegemonic strategy if and only if they are allowed to maintain their separateness. They then go on to write that “of course, every project for radical democracy implies a socialist dimension, as it is necessary to put an end to capitalist relations of production, which are at the root of numerous relations of subordination; but socialism is *one* of the components of a project for radical democracy, not vice versa” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 178). Only a few pages later, they defend liberalism as an ethical principle that defends the individual liberty to fulfill human capacities. At this point it seems unclear exactly what Laclau and Mouffe mean when they argue for this form of democratic practice. It seems clear enough that they reject any recourse to necessity or foundationalism, but why then is the democratic project inherently socialist? Furthermore, why is it that liberalism—rather than socialism—becomes equated with fulfilling human capacities? These

questions can leave the reader unsettled. It remains unclear as to how a radically contingent theory of democracy would necessarily allow for human flourishing, and this appears to be one of the greatest flaws of the normative prescriptions at the end of the work.

Marxist Responses to Laclau and Mouffe

Stuart Sim (2000) probably offers the best discussion of the debates that arose in the immediate aftermath of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*'s publication. He notes that the responses ranged from a "yes, but" from David Forgacs (1985) and Stanley Aronowitz (1987) to open criticism from Ellen Meiksins Wood (1986) to outright hostility from Norman Geras (1987). The first three of these responses will only be briefly addressed below. Forgacs finds much to admire in what Laclau and Mouffe have to say; however, he criticizes *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* on practical grounds. He wonders why it is that socialism ought to be maintained as the economic solution to the problems of capitalism when the property-owning classes are involved in the same hegemonic projects as the working class. Forgacs asks the question, "what is one actually going to *do* about the private property of one's middle-class partners in a hegemonic alliance?" (Forgacs 1985, 16). Aronowitz, on the other hand, contends that an inclusion of case studies (and a more explicit concern with contemporary, practical examples) would actually strengthen the argument of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. He argues that Laclau and Mouffe do themselves a disservice by conflating authority and authoritarianism and that this could be addressed by unpacking recent examples of hegemonic practice in places like Brazil and South Africa. This appears to be his only criticism in an otherwise positive endorsement of a project to move post-structuralism from the realm of literary to political theory. Finally, Ellen Meiksins Wood provides a book-length response to what she calls the "new 'true' socialism."¹⁰ She argues that by displacing the working class from its traditional role in socialist struggle, thinkers like Laclau and Mouffe actually produce a radically undemocratic alternative. Simply put, by moving the primary domain of political struggle from the material and into the discursive, it is only the experts on discourse that are able to decipher what ought to be done; that is, power is wrested from the hands of those that are directly affected by systems of domination and placed in the hands of academic discourse theorists. All of these criticisms point to various perceived shortcomings of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, but it is in the response of Norman Geras that the first wholesale dismissal of the project is found.

Geras's response, and the ensuing debate, will be used to highlight some of the most pointed criticisms of Laclau and Mouffe from a Marxist perspective.

While Geras's position ought not be considered representative of Marxism as a whole or of the particular type of Marxism that is being discussed in this book, his responses to Laclau and Mouffe offer clear distinctions that might be missed in a more nuanced or sympathetic reading.¹¹ Geras argues that Laclau and Mouffe's work fails on two fronts. First, he suggests that the version of Marxism that they present in the opening chapters of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* does not accurately reflect the Marxist tradition and its many nuanced variations. Second, Geras argues that the radical democratic solution that Laclau and Mouffe offer is "intellectually empty" (Geras 1988, 35). Geras claims that the thinkers that Laclau and Mouffe do discuss all suffer from the same pattern of dismissal on the grounds of dualism and essentialism (Geras 1987, 53). While there is improvement on these grounds as Laclau and Mouffe chronologically move through the Marxist tradition, ultimately, Geras notes, the development of the Marxist tradition appears to lead directly to Laclau and Mouffe's position. What he means by this is that Laclau and Mouffe attempt to read their own ideas (especially regarding essentialism, hegemony, and the symbolic) back onto previous thinkers in order to validate these ideas and their place in history (Geras 1987, 59–60). According to Geras, this leads to a misreading of everything from Luxemburg's concept of the mass strike to Althusser's argument for determination in the last instance by the economy. As far as the prescriptions offered up by Laclau and Mouffe, Geras is concerned that they are actually incapable of making normative claims, especially ones concerning the idea of progressiveness, once they have rejected foundationalism in toto (Geras 1987, 75). If this is the case, then any prescriptions being offered are in fact arbitrary in an absolute sense and the claims of the ultimately socialist character of the democratic imaginary cannot possibly hold up. This leaves Laclau and Mouffe in a very precarious position. If one accepts their criticisms of the Marxist tradition, it seems that it might not be possible to accept the alternative that is suggested.

While Geras's response to Laclau and Mouffe offers up plenty of reasons to *not* engage in their particular post-Marxist project, it does not necessarily offer up a vision of Marxism that is capable of coping with all of the very real concerns that are raised in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Geras's own version of Marxism, while never fully explicated in this particular conversation, does appear to respond to some of the criticisms offered up by Laclau and Mouffe; however, at other times, the dismissive tone of the conversation (on both sides) seems to brush these criticisms aside without ever taking them seriously. This could be because Geras does not find the book to be "theoretically worthwhile in any substantive respect" (Geras 1987, 42).

Enter Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis: A Radical Democratic Marxist Tradition

This book attempts to interject into this conversation by excavating, analyzing, and hopefully reviving a smaller tradition within the larger Marxist project. This tradition is best exemplified in the work of Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, and Cornelius Castoriadis. All of these thinkers fall within the camp of what could be termed libertarian Marxism yet, as will be argued, represent a unique sub-tradition within this grouping. While there has been a great deal of scholarship on James and, to a lesser extent, Castoriadis, there is very little secondary literature on Dunayevskaya. Furthermore, these three thinkers have yet to be thoroughly discussed as part of a unique tradition in critical Marxism, as scholarly discussions of their work link them together only superficially if at all.¹² In light of this, it is argued that this relatively neglected tradition offers a useful source for contemporary political theory, given the moment of crisis that capitalism is facing. In order to substantiate this claim, the book focuses primarily on the thought of Raya Dunayevskaya (using James and Castoriadis, when useful, as counterpoints within the same constellation of thought), while pushing forward the idea that her work does represent a distinct tradition with unique contributions to both academic and activist oriented Marxism.

These three thinkers, considered as a group, are important for several reasons. First, the simple fact that these thinkers were engaged with one another in a sympathetic fashion at some points is not a trivial one. Dunayevskaya and James were involved with theoretical and activist work both during their time in American Trotskyist circles and after their rejection of and distancing from the official party line. Castoriadis, who also had a Trotskyist origin, interacted with Dunayevskaya and James in the 1940s and was subsequently involved with James and Grace Lee Boggs both before and during their publication of *Facing Reality* (1958). All of these thinkers knew each other on some level through both correspondence and engagement in the same struggles.

Second, all three thinkers shared similar concerns that were not necessarily at the forefront of the Marxist discourse of the time or since. An almost obsessive passion for freedom followed Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis throughout their careers. While it could be argued that others, such as the Frankfurt School theorists (especially Marcuse), also emphasized freedom, this was often done at the expense of or in rejection of Marxist categories themselves (including belief in the possibility of socialist revolution). Alongside this concern was a constant struggle against a dogmatic form of Marxism that was dominant at the time. While this eventually resulted in

Castoriadis's dismissal of Marxism in its entirety, he still serves as a key figure and useful counterpoint in this tradition.¹³

Third, these individuals can be classified as intellectuals, but they were not academics. Castoriadis and James both held academic positions near the end of their lives, while Dunayevskaya remained outside of the academy for the entirety of her own life. This is not to say that they did not produce high-quality intellectual work; rather, they each produced highly rigorous theoretical texts that were never solely targeted at an academic audience. The intended audiences of these writings always included rank and file trade unionists or activist students and intellectuals. This ought to be of importance for scholars engaged in the Marxist project of doing more than simply interpreting the world around them.

Finally, even after their time working together, Dunayevskaya and James both emphasized the importance of non-class-based social movements. Their writings on race and, especially for Dunayevskaya, gender represent a defining moment for an American left that turned its attention to the intersectionality of gender, race, and class only years later. While this attention to gender and race eventually became the norm in Marxist and Marxist-influenced discourse, Dunayevskaya and James were on the cutting edge of this movement. This emphasis is critical for overcoming—*within* Marxist theory—the class essentialism of orthodox Marxism.

While it is essential to understand the relevance of these authors as a group, it is equally important to emphasize the uniqueness of the work of Dunayevskaya and its usefulness in reimagining a Marxist theory for today. While it is true that all three thinkers were exceptionally critical of the Soviet Union, it was Dunayevskaya who was able to construct a unique form of dialectical philosophy rooted in Hegel (what she called Marxist-Humanism) out of this criticism. Both Castoriadis and James contributed immensely to Marxist thought in their own way, but it is Dunayevskaya who, by fully exploring the Hegelian influence on Marx and the revolutionary dimensions of Hegelianism itself, constructs a radically open version of Marxism that still maintains its close link with rank and file labor struggles. This ought to be of special significance for those scholars interested in a theoretical perspective that avoids many of the snares encountered in more entrenched versions of academic Marxism. Furthermore, her particular legacy has yet to be fully explored in any context, let alone the context of academic political theory.

What has been written about Dunayevskaya is limited and fragmentary. The only book-length treatment of Dunayevskaya's life and thought, her nephew Eugene Gogol's *Raya Dunayevskaya: Philosopher of Marxist-Humanism* (2004), suffers from a lack of theoretical focus and borders on

the hagiographic at points. While Gogol offers a source of information on the life of Dunayevskaya, it is difficult to garner much more from this work. Other treatments of Dunayevskaya's thought, which place it in the context of other Marxist and Hegelian thinkers, can be found in the writings of Kevin Anderson and Peter Hudis. Anderson's *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism* (1995) emphasizes the impact of Lenin's encounter with Hegelian philosophy on various Marxist thinkers—among them James, Dunayevskaya, Henri Lefebvre, Louis Althusser, and Georg Lukács. Substantive discussion is devoted to Dunayevskaya's appropriation and critique of Lenin's thought. Meanwhile, Hudis and Anderson's introduction to the Dunayevskaya anthology, *The Power of Negativity* (2002), offers an account of Dunayevskaya's particular approach to the issue of Hegelian dialectics. The authors differentiate Dunayevskaya's position from both Western Marxists, such as Lukács, Marcuse, and her collaborator C.L.R. James, and from more recent thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Moishe Postone. A number of other writings on Dunayevskaya by other authors—as seen in the bibliography—have taken a similar approach by emphasizing Dunayevskaya's attachment to a particular interpretation of Hegelian Marxism and carving out a space within the Marxist tradition in which this mode of thought exists. I build upon this groundwork and argue that Dunayevskaya's framework offers a theoretical grounding for a response to the external challenges to Marxism that have arisen in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This book should be understood as an intervention into two major theoretical conversations. The first of these has to do with the post-structuralist critique of Marxism as exemplified by Laclau and Mouffe.¹⁴ The second of these is concerned with the Marxist tradition itself and has to do with the development of Marx's thought throughout his life, more specifically with how the thinkers under discussion here read Marx's relationship to Hegel and the concepts that he draws from Hegel's work and how a direct return to Hegel can help to rethink Marxism. Both of these lines of discussion will be unpacked by exploring the literature related to each. It is argued that these two conversations are intimately linked and that we can better understand the one by bringing it into conversation with the other through the use of Dunayevskaya's writings.

A Unique Form of Hegelian Marxism

In order to treat the work of Laclau and Mouffe with the seriousness that it deserves, it is essential to provide a robust defense of Marxism as a tradition grounded in practical emancipatory struggles as well as a mode of dialectical thinking with its roots in the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel. The

particular version of Marxism for which this book argues draws heavily upon a tradition that finds its roots in Lenin's 1914 writings on Hegel as well as Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*. However, it rejects both the authoritarian tendencies that seem to come along with Leninism of all stripes as well as the movement toward political quietism that came to be associated with academic Marxism in the West.¹⁵ Thus, in order to fully understand the proposed response to Laclau and Mouffe, it is important to first provide a genealogy of this Hegelian–Marxist tradition in order to establish both the context and relevance of such a response.

The first real appropriation of Hegel for post-Marx Marxism is found in Lenin's World War I notebooks. While these notebooks were not published until over a decade later, it has been argued that they represent an important step in the formation of what would later be called Western Marxism as well as a critical break in Lenin's own conceptualization of organization and dialectics. In these notebooks, a transformation from the reductionist materialism of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908) as well as a movement away from the vanguardism of the *What Is to Be Done?* (1902) position informed by Hegel's *Science of Logic* can be observed.¹⁶ This is not to say that traces of vanguardism and authoritarianism cannot be seen in some of his post-1914 writings such as *State and Revolution* (1917), which still includes some references to a vanguard party. This transformation ought to lead scholars to reconsider the generalization of Lenin as an authoritarian (despite the fact that his politics ultimately remained so). While this shift in Lenin's thought was ignored for a long period, many Western Marxists tended to look to his vastly inferior *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* for insights into his philosophical views. However, it is Lenin's notes on Hegel in particular that were picked up by Dunayevskaya and James, leading to their own investigation of the Hegelian method.¹⁷

While Lenin's notebooks on Hegel represent an important shift within Marxist thought, they were not published, even in Russian, until 1929–30, although some shorter Lenin essays on Hegel and dialectics did appear in the early 1920s. However, it is with the publication of Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* in 1923 that a new debate over Marx's relationship to Hegelian philosophy takes place. Korsch, who quotes Lenin on Hegel, argues that Marxism itself represents a particular moment in history and in the history of philosophy especially. Specifically, he claims that Marxism is part of the process of realizing and overcoming philosophy itself. In this way, Korsch appropriates the Hegelian Marxist dialectical method in order to critique Marxism itself. Thus, he is able to move away from a static, dogmatic conception of Marxist theory in order to understand the relationship between theory and

practice as an historical movement. That said, Korsch relies on a distinction between Hegelian philosophy and Marxist theory that might be untenable if his own thesis is to hold. Viewing Marxist theory as a break from philosophy, rather than a dialectical development of it, undermines some of the radical elements in Hegel's own thought and ignores the historical and materialist elements that Lenin himself found so useful in Hegel.

Lukács also rejects dogmatic Marxism by claiming that what is essential to a truly orthodox Marxism is the dialectical method itself. However, Lukács fails on two counts. Politically, he holds onto an ultra-Leninist conception of the vanguard party. Philosophically, he maintains a distinction between Hegelian idealism and Marxist materialism rather than understanding the two as a differentiated unity. Ultimately, this may have helped to prevent Lukács from breaking publicly with Stalinism until the 1950s.

An additional place to look for investigations of the Hegel–Marx connection is in the writings of the Frankfurt School critical theorists. While Theodor Adorno¹⁸ wrote extensively on the subject of Marxist dialectics, Herbert Marcuse was the first among the original generation of Frankfurt School theorists to engage Hegel's thought (and its influence on Marx and other social theorists) in a book-length project. Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* (1941) still stands as one of the most significant Marxist studies on Hegel. The first half of this work offers a materialist interpretation of Hegel's thought, from the early theological writings up through the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology*. The second half attempts to link this reading of Hegel with various thinkers and schools of thought of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His discussion of Marx is important here as it presents a rejection of "fatalistic determinism" by referring back to Hegel's notions of reason and totality. Furthermore, it contains one of the first in-depth discussions of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

One thing to note, however, is that Dunayevskaya and James's writings on the dialectic transpired in a distinctly American socio-historical context. Lenin's writings on Hegel were an attempt to understand the relevance of dialectics in the context of Russia in the early 20th century. Lukács and Korsch were responding to problems encountered in the academic study of Marxism in Continental Europe in the 1920s.¹⁹ What Dunayevskaya and James have to offer then is an analysis of the meaning of Hegelian Marxism in a country that did not have a widespread social democratic movement. They were aware of the debates going on in Europe at the time but were very much concerned with the implication of these debates for rank and file industrial workers in the United States. While Castoriadis arrived in France from Greece in the 1940s, he was marginalized there until the 1960s, in

large part because of his critique of the Soviet Union. Whereas Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis were all concerned with rank and file labor in opposition to the burgeoning “labor bureaucracy” and with the critique of what they saw as Soviet totalitarianism, James and Dunayevskaya were also able to transcend standard class based analysis and bring into Marxist methodology a discussion of race and gender.

Further, both James and Dunayevskaya followed Lenin’s lead in emphasizing Hegel’s *Logic*, whereas most Western Marxist discussions of Hegel had focused on the *Phenomenology*. This rather unusual emphasis is important for understanding the conclusions that were arrived at. Furthermore, emphasizing the *Logic* allowed Dunayevskaya to see both Hegel and Marx as transcending simple idealism or materialism in favor of a new humanism that represented the unity of both incomplete modes of thinking. This is especially evident in Hegel’s final chapter of the *Logic* on the absolute Idea, in which he holds that the absolute Idea is in fact the identity of the theoretical and practical Idea, while each on their own represent a one-sided reality (Hegel 1969, 864).²⁰ Moreover, she links Hegel’s concept of the absolute Idea to Marx’s statement that “philosophy can only be realized by the abolition of the proletariat, and the proletariat can only be abolished by the realization of philosophy” (Marx 1978, 65).²¹ This conclusion distinguishes Dunayevskaya—and, to an extent, James—from most of her European counterparts that were forced into a rejection of idealism due to either political pressures coming from official Marxism in the Soviet Union or an incomplete reading of Hegel’s thought and thus of Marx’s appropriation of Hegel.

The Structure of the Book

These arguments are carried out over the course of three substantive chapters and respond to the three criticisms leveled against the Marxist tradition in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. They engage both the theoretical and historical elements of Laclau and Mouffe’s arguments; because of this, the book straddles genres and argumentative styles. Ultimately, the arguments being made depend upon both the groundwork laid by previous thinkers as well as the synthetic approach being used to place them in conversation with current debates around the fate of Marxist theory and radical leftist politics in general. At times the text reads as an intellectual history, but it is an argument-driven history carried out in order to prove the relevance of these thinkers if we Marxists are to be able to move beyond some of the limitations of this tradition.

The first step in this process involves a response to the charges of authoritarianism directed at Marxism. This requires an analysis of Dunayevskaya,

James, and Castoriadis's conception of the political, especially as it relates to their criticisms of totalitarianism and the Soviet Union. In this section, their views on state capitalism (for Dunayevskaya and James) and bureaucratic capitalism (for Castoriadis) will be discussed and critiqued. This conversation will center on the similarities and differences in both the criticisms of the Soviet Union as well as the conceptions of politics that these thinkers hold. Finally, the chapter ends by drawing out a theory of radical democracy grounded in Dunayevskaya, and James, and Castoradis's unique interpretation of the Marxist tradition.

The next chapter involves a careful analysis of Dunayevskaya and James's involvement with Hegelian philosophy in order to respond to critiques of crude materialism and class essentialism in the Marxist tradition. I compare the writings of Dunayevskaya and James both during their period of collaboration as the Johnson–Forest tendency as well as after their divergence in 1955. Here, the emphasis will be placed on their appropriation of Hegelian dialectics in order to construct a unique conception of Marxism that avoids the problems of economic reductionism, historical determinism, and organizational vanguardism. On the one hand, these positions will be compared with those of their immediate predecessors and contemporaries (Lenin will serve as the example of official Marxism's Hegelian encounter, while Lukács, Korsch, Marcuse, and Lefebvre will be treated as representative of critical Hegelian Marxism), while the contrast with Althusser's rejection of the Hegelian moment, and subsequent humanism, in Marx's thought will be presented on the other. Disagreements between James and Dunayevskaya regarding the relationship of intellectuals/revolutionary organizations and workers will be analyzed in light of their own particular interpretations of Hegel's *Phenomenology* as well as his *Logic*. Finally, this chapter will take up Marx's early writings, which were crucial for Dunayevskaya's own critical appropriation of Hegel in *Philosophy and Revolution* (1973).

Next, the issues of race and gender will be discussed in order to examine the critique of Marxism as class essentialist. Dunayevskaya and James wrote extensively on these issues both as they affected the labor movement in the United States as well as Third World liberation movements. This section will analyze these writings, especially in light of post-Marxist criticisms of Marxism as economically reductionist and class essentialist. Laclau and Mouffe's discussion of the New Social Movements in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* will be used as an example of such criticisms.

Finally, once it has been established that the writings of Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis do represent a unique tradition within Marxist

thought that is capable of standing up to recent criticisms of Marxism by Laclau and Mouffe, among others, it is argued in the conclusion that Marxism does in fact remain useful for both intellectuals and activists living under early 21st-century capitalism. In order to do this, these writings will be discussed in conjunction with the writings of autonomist Marxists such as Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt as well as contemporary anarchists, such as Richard Day, who find themselves sympathetic to the Marxist critique of capital. This section will touch on the concepts that were explained in the previous sections in order to demonstrate their utility for analysis and critique of contemporary crises in capital. That is, Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis's interpretation of the Marxist tradition, with its emphasis on radical democracy and rejection of essentialisms of any sort, will be shown to be a useful contribution to ongoing discussions of political, economic, and social justice both within and without the academy.

Thus, my aim here is to interrogate and argue in favor of the contemporary relevance of a particular Marxist tradition in juxtaposition with other strands of (critical and orthodox) Marxism, as well as post-structuralism. In the preceding pages, I have laid out Laclau and Mouffe's critique of Marxism as exemplified in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and distinguished the positions of Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis from those Marxist thinkers that do in fact fall prey to these criticisms. I argue for the presence—and the theoretical significance—of a radically democratic, non-essentialist, and non-reductionist tradition within the broader Marxist tradition. This is done by showing how the writings of Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis respond to each of these three points. Finally, the contemporary relevance of these thinkers is demonstrated by briefly touching upon the importance of a Hegelian–Marxist response to current issues as well as by using such a response to supplement current Marxist and anarchist approaches to economic and political crises.

Notes

- 1 This resurgence has been most marginalized within the discipline of political science. While many political theorists are carrying out research under the banner of critical theory, this type of work has come down through a tradition that has grown increasingly less Marxist over time. This project argues for a particular reading of Hegelian Marxism that might enable political scientists to reengage with Marxism in a new and useful way.
- 2 Even those Arendtians who find themselves falling back upon Athenian conceptions of politics and citizenship, and are thus critical of modern conceptions of these ideas, limit their criticisms of capitalist relations per se.

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- 3 This is not to say that critical theorists ought to engage in drawing up so-called blueprints for the future; however, many variants of Marxist socialism have always retained a notion of an alternative to existing society as a real possibility, which appears to be lacking in certain strands of post-structuralist thought.
- 4 There is an assumption of a basic understanding of and sympathy to the broader Marxist position and leftist/anti-capitalist politics in general at work throughout the text. Because this book is primarily a response to a particular set of post-Marxist critiques, very little time will be spent on a defense of Marx's general criticism of capitalist political economy or on other contemporary debates within Marxist theoretical circles. That said, reference will be made to these debates throughout the book, primarily in the form of footnotes. The most interesting conversations for the purpose at hand are those taking place between Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, and Ernesto Laclau as well as those centered on "the Idea of communism" inspired by the conference of the same name.
- 5 See Richard Rorty's 1992 article, "The Intellectuals at the End of Socialism," for a discussion of the mood of and future prospects for American leftist intellectuals just after the fall of the Soviet Union. Rorty offers a more radical version of Laclau and Mouffe's position and argues against any sort of vision of future democratic/socialist society in favor of a hopeful pragmatism. In this way, Rorty, and many American intellectuals, found themselves in a position similar to European critical theorists of the Habermasian persuasion. See Albrecht Wellmer's *Endgames* (1998) for an example of a similar European position. What this points to is a movement away from utopianism and grand narratives among groups as diverse as critical theorists, post-structuralists, and American pragmatists. Again, it is the post-structuralist critiques that are most relevant for the project at hand.
- 6 Recently, Bruno Bosteels (2014) has done work to gesture toward an alternative to Laclau and Mouffe's conception of radical democracy. Bosteels draws upon Badiou's thought (both in his Maoist phase and after) in order to rethink a Marxian politics.
- 7 They also both experienced a turn toward Gramsci after ultimately finding themselves unsatisfied with Althusser's version of Marxism. However, it is evident that Althusser's influence, specifically his anti-humanism and anti-Hegelianism, never completely disappeared from their work. Moreover, Althusser himself was heavily influenced by Gramsci. In this sense, their earlier Marxism had a substantially different philosophical basis from the more Hegelianized Marxism of Dunayevskaya, James, and, to a lesser extent, Castoriadis.
- 8 This means that not only are all revolutionary subject positions necessarily class based but also that all facets of the social totality are in fact determined by the economy in the last instance.
- 9 I argue that these kinds of arguments betray a profound misunderstanding of the Hegelian concept of totality. This is further addressed in the chapter on Dunayevskaya's appropriation of Hegelian dialectics.
- 10 This is a direct reference to the group of socialists that Marx and Engels criticized in *The German Ideology* (1846). The "true" socialists were accused of forsaking the particular in the name of the universal and thus improperly understanding the historical nature of class struggle.
- 11 Geras, like Laclau and Mouffe, emerged from the Althusserian brand of structuralist Marxism. While one might expect this to generate a sympathetic reading

of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Geras, what one finds is the exact opposite. Laclau and Mouffe (1987) suggest that Geras responds to their work with accusations of betrayal, and while Geras himself denies these charges (and there is little direct textual to suggest that they are accurate), the aura of dismissal that permeates Geras's writing could have something to do with their shared background.

- 12 Passing references to this particular constellation of thinkers have been made by some scholars, see Cleaver (1979) and Ojeili (2010) as examples.
- 13 It can be argued that it was in fact Castoriadis's relative lack of engagement with Hegelian dialectics that was a factor in his eventual conclusion that Marxism comprised a closed system incapable of responding to a dynamic, open reality. For this reason, Castoriadis is of most importance in the early portions of this book in which the radically democratic prospects of Marxist theory are being discussed. He is of little use when it comes to reconstructing the Hegelian position being argued for throughout the text.
- 14 This is not to say that post-structuralism itself is necessarily hostile to Marxist thought. See Simon Choat (2010) for a discussion of the relationship of several key post-structuralist thinkers with the thought of Marx. However, Laclau and Mouffe are understood to be engaging in a project whose ultimate outcome is a rejection of Marxism. In this regard, the criticisms of Laclau and Mouffe as advanced by Norman Geras (1987, 1988) are viewed as accurate.
- 15 In this sense, it will be argued that, although they share similar roots, Dunayevskaya's Marxist-Humanism—as well as the work of James and Castoriadis—stands distinct from Western Marxism as typically conceived.
- 16 The use of the *Logic* is fascinating in its own right considering that many post-World War II Western Marxists, especially in France, tended to look toward the *Phenomenology* for insights into the Hegelian contribution to radical thought.
- 17 See Kevin Anderson's *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism* (1995) for a discussion of the history of the appropriation of Lenin's encounter with Hegel by these and other Western Marxist thinkers. As discussed below, another Western Marxist who saw the importance of Lenin's notes on Hegel was Henri Lefebvre, who translated them into French during the 1930s.
- 18 Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966) is, to be sure, an important contribution to Hegel studies; however, it is not addressed at length here for two main reasons. First, its later date of publication removes it from the chronology established in this project. That is, Adorno is not engaged in the same conversation as the other thinkers addressed in this section. Second, Adorno is engaged in a *philosophical* project that is critical of Hegel, Kant, and Heidegger. Again, this points to the fact that his *Negative Dialectics* does not respond to the same issues as the other thinkers mentioned above (despite the fact that Adorno does provide a sophisticated analysis and critique of Hegelian dialectics in this work). Again, Adorno's *Hegel: Three Studies* (1963) is a similar work that attempted to bring Hegel back into the conversation among young German scholars at the time—especially those familiar with Marx's writings but perhaps not with Hegel's.
- 19 This is not to say that they were not concerned with real issues of activism and social transformation; rather, they were very much concerned with these issues but were responding to them within the confines of the philosophic tradition in which they found themselves.
- 20 It is also important to note that, a few sentences below this, Hegel also remarks that the absolute Idea itself contains within itself the highest degree of opposition.

This ought to cause unease in supporters of Laclau and Mouffe, or others who argue that the Hegelian system is static and closes off the realm of possibility.

- 21 The very Hegelian language of this passage should not go un-noted. *Aufhebung*, translated here as “abolition,” can also be translated as “sublation” or “preservation.” It should therefore not be considered an abolition in the sense of destruction but rather an overcoming that preserves elements of the original concept. Realization also carries with it a specific meaning in Hegel. For the purpose at hand, what ought to be taken from this statement by Marx is the relationship between ideas and material practice. This is discussed in more detail in the third chapter’s analysis of Marcuse.

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2 Radical Democracy in the Marxist Tradition

Critiques of Marxism's lack of an emphasis on democratic practice are nothing new; however, it is only with the emergence of post-structuralist criticisms in the mid-1980s that a systematic argument for the inherency of authoritarianism in the Marxist tradition was leveled from the left. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, claim that the authoritarian seed is found in the orthodoxy of Karl Kautsky and reaches fruition in Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* This chapter seeks to explore these claims by first unpacking the argument put forth in the first two chapters of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. Second, Lenin's own politics and philosophy will be examined in the context of the transformation that occurred between the writing of *What Is to Be Done?* and *The State and Revolution*, with particular attention being paid to the analysis of this transformation by Raya Dunayevskaya. Third, critiques of the state or bureaucratic capitalist form, which contains within it the totalitarianism of Stalinism and of bureaucracy in general, from Dunayevskaya, James, and Cornelius Castoriadis will be discussed in order to understand how it is that so-called "actually existing socialism" was able to become the exact opposite of the liberating regime that it promised itself to be. Fourth, the investigations of spontaneous working class action and organization carried out by Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis will be discussed in order to draw out the democratic and participatory elements that define this libertarian strand within the broader Marxist tradition. Finally, it will be argued that authoritarianism is not in fact an essential, if unwanted, component of Marxist theory and that there is instead an overwhelming tendency toward radical, libertarian democracy found within this tradition.

Vanguardism, Authoritarianism, and the Specter of Totalitarianism

Hegemony, Class Essentialism, and Authoritarianism

While the principle aim of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is to address the problem of working class fragmentation for Marxist theory, in the course of carrying out this task, Laclau and Mouffe identify three other problems that appear to be persistent within the Marxist tradition. The first of these problems, and the one discussed in this chapter, is the idea that Marxism itself contains an inner kernel of totalitarianism that cannot be avoided if one wishes to remain within this paradigm.¹ This problem arises in the attempt of Marxist theorists to account for the fact of class fragmentation and finds its ultimate fulfillment in the terror of Stalinism. The argument presented in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is unique not only because it is more nuanced and systematic than previous criticisms of Marxist totalitarianism but also because of the fact that it is coming from a radical leftist position.² The following pages will lay out the core of this argument.

In their discussion of the emergence of Marxist orthodoxy as a response to the problem of class fragmentation, Laclau and Mouffe point to Karl Kautsky as being responsible not only for introducing a type of political quietism based on a particular conception of historical necessity but also for planting the seeds of authoritarianism in Marxist theory. While these may seem like contradictory claims, Laclau and Mouffe carefully lay out the connection between these two positions. Quietism arose as the result of a blending of Hegelian teleology and a Darwinian conception of history as evolution. Laclau and Mouffe argue that this particular blending of two very different traditions enabled orthodoxy to view history as a necessary evolution toward the ultimate goal of working class unity and a transition to socialism (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 20). It also opened up a new role for intellectuals; they would become the mediating group with a consciousness of historical necessity and a privileged position in directing the fragmented working class toward unity and revolution. It is this privileged position for intellectuals that introduced a potential for authoritarianism and had such a profound impact on Lenin's conception of the vanguard party.

How exactly did Kautskyan quietism become Leninist authoritarianism? It is important to turn to the context of Russia at the turn of the 20th century in order to find the answer to this question. Russia of the late nineteenth and early 20th century was hardly the ideal place to launch a Marxist revolution. The industrialized nations of England, Germany, and the United States all seemed to be fertile grounds to plant the seed

of proletarian revolt, while Russia, with its large peasant population and autocratic regime, was a veritable desert. This situation required Russian theoreticians to reconcile their own situation with the orthodox conception of history as unilinear and necessary. Laclau and Mouffe argue that in order to understand the Russian peasant masses as capable of carrying out the task of establishing bourgeois democracy in the name of the working class, the idea of hegemony had to be introduced (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 49–51). In this case, it appeared that the relatively small and impotent Russian bourgeoisie was incapable of overthrowing absolutism of its own accord and it was up to the majority of the population to carry this task out instead. Marxist orthodoxy, with its evolutionary view of history, held that the task of overthrowing absolutism belonged to the bourgeoisie and that the task of establishing socialism belonged to the working class—yet neither of these situations could occur in this fashion in the Russian context. Instead, Lenin, Plekhanov, and others argued that it was necessary for the working class leadership to channel the strength of the limited working class population along with the peasant masses in order to bring about both revolutions in one sweeping motion. Laclau and Mouffe argue that “an opposition arose between a *necessary interior* (corresponding to the tasks of the class in a ‘normal’ development) and a *contingent exterior* (the ensemble of tasks alien to the class nature of the social agents which they had to assume at a given moment)” (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 49). The problem of tying classes to tasks is an important one and will be addressed in chapter four; however, right now the problem of this opposition, especially as it pertains to the working class leadership and the troubling history of authoritarianism, must be addressed.

Laclau and Mouffe claim that there is a moment in the construction of the hegemonic project that presents Marxism with the possibility of a democratic base, yet it is precisely at this moment that Marxism in practice turned toward an even more vanguardist and anti-democratic conception of hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 56). Because neither the revolutionary subjects nor the tasks at hand become substantially transformed in the face of hegemonic fusion, the external nature of this relationship becomes quite clear. Furthermore, it also becomes quite evident that the relationship between masses and classes, and the working class and its own leadership, is one of subordination and domination. The authors note that this domination has its origin in the orthodox description of the working class as the universal class destined to bring about social revolution; however, for Kautsky and others, the task of the working class was the proletarianization of the masses while the Leninist project did not seek to transform the class identity of the masses. What this means is that the political centrality

of the working class (and its leadership, in the form of a vanguard party, in particular) remains even while the majority of the revolutionary subjects are not members of this class. For this reason, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the Leninist hegemonic project makes inevitable what was only implicit in orthodoxy.

Rethinking Leninism

How did this play out in Lenin's own politics? The answer to this question depends on the narrative that is followed. According to Laclau and Mouffe, among others, authoritarianism makes itself first known in Lenin's *What Is to Be Done?* and reaches its inevitable conclusion in the Bolshevik domination of international communism (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 59). The alternative narrative suggests that Lenin experienced a conversion of sorts beginning with his observations of spontaneous democratic organizations in the 1905 revolution and culminating in his philosophic studies during World War I. Some advocates of this alternative narrative propose that during the outbreak of nationalism experienced by international communism during World War I, Lenin immersed himself in the study of Hegelian philosophy. The outcome of this project was his philosophic notebooks; however, this study also had a direct impact on his political views, as is evidenced by his *The State and Revolution*. Both of these narratives will be explored below.

The position taken by Laclau and Mouffe, as well as several other critics of Lenin, is that Lenin's stance on the role of the vanguard party remained consistent between the years 1902 and 1917. There is some variation in this position. Laclau and Mouffe seem to argue for the inevitability of the increase in authoritarian characteristics in Lenin's philosophy from early on. Others, including post-structuralists, anarchists, liberals, and Marxists, recognize a shift in Lenin's thought sometime between 1902 and the writing of *The State and Revolution* in 1917; however, they hold that Lenin's politics remained essentially authoritarian, as evidenced by his insistence on Bolshevik control of the democratic organs of the revolution and the Soviets and his involvement in the suppression of the 1921 Kronstadt uprising. Thus, despite any diversity within this range positions, they all hold that, ultimately, it was the ideas formulated in *What Is to Be Done?* that drove Lenin's political actions throughout the years. At this point, a brief encounter with these ideas is necessary.

What Is to Be Done? was written by Lenin in 1902 in order to confront several issues that Russian socialism was dealing with at the time. One of the primary issues that Lenin was personally concerned with involved the

nature and role of the socialist organization. He approaches this discussion by framing it in terms of the relation between spontaneity and consciousness; that is, between the masses and the revolutionary organization. He argues that spontaneity represents consciousness in an “embryonic form” (Lenin [1902] 1966, 74). In discussing the Russian strikes of the 1890s, Lenin notes that “They testified to the awakening antagonisms between workers and employers, but the workers were not and could not be conscious of the irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system” (Lenin [1902] 1966, 74). At this point the famous pronouncement is made that true Social Democratic consciousness could only be brought to the working class from without.³ Lenin notes the origins of modern socialist thought are to be found outside of the working class, in the radical bourgeois intelligentsia. Furthermore, he appears to have nothing but contempt for those socialists who look to the spontaneous activity of the working class in order to find a means of generating class consciousness.

All of this seems to corroborate Laclau and Mouffe’s account of Leninism as a theory of hegemony that requires an external organization in order to direct the masses toward socialism. In *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe claim that they, too, are opposed to any notion of unmediated spontaneism; however, they also note that the problem with Lenin’s form of hegemonic mediation requires a type of political representation that inevitably leads to authoritarianism. This is because “Once every political relation is conceived as a relation of representation, a progressive substitutionism moves from class to party . . . and from party to Soviet State” (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 59). This form of representation as substitution can be imagined as a series of concentric circles that ultimately ends at the core of Bolshevik leadership representing and acting in the name of all of Russian society. But is this what Lenin had in mind? Furthermore, is this a position that he maintained after witnessing the spontaneous activity of the masses during the 1905 revolution?

In order to answer this question, it is important to turn to the alternate narrative that was described above. One crucial aspect of this alternate narrative is that Lenin’s pre-1905 position must be understood for what it is. It is easy to dismiss Lenin’s position as simple vanguardism or as an authoritarianism that is the unavoidable result of a theoretical tension inherent in the Marxist tradition; however, as was noted above, a more nuanced reading is possible and perhaps necessary. It is important to note that Lenin speaks of bringing consciousness to the workers from without multiple times in *What Is to Be Done?* and each time it is done in a different context. One example of this is when Lenin speaks of this “without” not in

terms of an outside party but in terms of a sphere of activity that is outside of the worker–employer relationship. What Lenin is getting at here is that the working class cannot be made aware of its true revolutionary potential simply through workplace actions or propaganda (whether this is spontaneous working class activity or the work of a vanguard party appears to be irrelevant here). Instead, he argues that “the sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is . . . the sphere of the interrelations between *all* the various classes” (Lenin [1902] 1966, 112). In other words, the problem with spontaneism, for Lenin, is not that it emphasizes the democratic moment over the authoritarian moment; it is that it favors workplace action over political consciousness. Lenin’s preferred solution to this problem in *What Is to Be Done?* is a vanguard party that disperses among all classes in an effort to raise consciousness of the interrelations of these classes; however, the possibility of a democratic solution to this puzzle exists, and Lenin attached himself more and more to this possibility after witnessing the spontaneous *political* action of the working class in 1905.

Raya Dunayevskaya, in *Marxism and Freedom*, argues that in emphasizing the dual nature of (and hegemonic project required by) the Russian revolution, Lenin was in fact anticipating the outbreak of democratic activity that occurred in 1905 (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 181). The creation of the Soviets represented the possibility for the working class to engage in politically conscious activity without the assistance of elite party leadership. By looking to the Soviets as the definitive answer to the question of whether or not the working class was capable of arriving at class consciousness by independent means, Dunayevskaya claims that Lenin “took the *highest* point reached by the revolution and built *from there*” (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 184). *The State and Revolution* (1917) was the result of this project. In this book, Lenin comes close to rejecting the authoritarian elements of his thought that are associated with his name because of *What Is to Be Done?* Furthermore, he offers up a positive theory of democracy based on his observations of the Soviets and mass strikes.⁴

Dunayevskaya views Lenin addressing what he sees as two distortions of the Marxist theory of the state. He begins by emphasizing the point made by Marx and Engels concerning the origin of the state: it exists in order to keep class conflict from tearing society apart. Furthermore, in order to do so, it exists above society—as something alien to it. Lenin argues that the ideas of irreconcilable class conflict and of the state as an alien and alienating force are essential to any Marxist understanding of the state; yet, the reformists viewed the state as an organ for the reconciliation of class conflict while orthodoxy ignored the alien nature of the state and thus the need to destroy it in the course of the revolution (Lenin [1917] 1966, 273–274). For

Dunayevskaya, this first maneuver is essential for understanding the rest of Lenin's position both in this particular text and in practice both during and after the revolution. Lenin is at this point reconciling himself with the original position of Marx and Engels while rejecting both of the alternatives that came about during the crisis of Marxism around the turn of the century. In doing so, he revisits the classic Marxist notion of the withering away of the state. He argues that in using this phrase, Engels is speaking not of the state as it currently exists because in the same breath Engels has already noted that the seizure of state power and appropriation of property will in fact put an end to the proletariat, class antagonisms, and the state as the state (Engels [1884] 1978, 752). If it is the case that the state as such has already been abolished, the state that is being spoken of as withering away can at best be understood as a pseudo-state that, because it cannot exist in order to mitigate class conflict (as this has been done away with in the course of the revolution), also need not be conceived of as something alien to society itself. While Lenin does spend a great deal of time discussing the nature of such a state (including a discussion of unalienated forms of military and democratic bodies) this discussion must now turn to the nature of the revolution that abolishes the bourgeois state in the first place.

Lenin turns to Marx's analysis of the Paris Commune of 1871 in order to draw out the task of the masses in revolutionary times. In *The Civil War in France*, Marx notes that the lesson learned from the Communards is that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery and wield it for its own purposes" (Marx [1871] 1978, 629). Lenin argues that while orthodox Marxists of the time interpreted this as a warning against the dangers of reformism, it is properly understood as a warning against the seizure of state power without the abolition of state power (Lenin [1917] 1966, 297). But this is only half of the lesson learned from Marx's analysis of the Commune. The second half of this lesson involves the actors involved in the task of destroying the state as the state. Lenin refers to a letter written by Marx in 1871 and published in *Neue Zeit* in 1901; Marx makes the claim that this task of smashing the state apparatus is "essential for every real people's revolution." Lenin makes special note of this phrase "people's revolution." He claims that many Marxists might write this phrasing off and simply move on; however, he insists that one of the true lessons to be learned from the Parish Commune is that true revolution must be a people's revolution. What this means is that revolution is not the sole property of either the proletariat or of its vanguard; instead, revolution requires that "the mass of the people, the enormous majority, come out actively, independently, with its own economic and political demands" (Lenin [1917] 1966, 298). This is a far cry from the calls for party leadership

and party discipline found in *What Is to Be Done?* These calls are instead replaced by a call to look toward the spontaneous activity of the masses in order to guide the party, and it is his observations from 1905 that guided him in coming to this conclusion.

At this point, several core concepts can be drawn from *The State and Revolution*. First, the notion of the abolition of an alienated form of politics is one of the primary goals of socialist revolution. Second, this revolution can only be carried out from below. Third, the revolutionary subject is not merely the working class but the people as a whole. All three of these ideas seem to point toward a radically democratic element in the Leninist project that thinkers like Laclau and Mouffe either ignore or dismiss as merely theoretical in nature. Dunayevskaya takes issue with such a reading and instead argues that Lenin, from as early as his immediate observations of the 1905 revolution, underwent a conversion in both theory and practice.

Dunayevskaya notes that upon observing the spontaneous actions of the 1905 revolution, Lenin immediately reversed his position on the possibility of the masses attaining true class (and, thus, Social Democratic) consciousness on their own. Furthermore, Lenin insisted that the once small vanguard party ought to open its arms to these masses. This seems to resolve, both theoretically and practically, the issue noted above concerning the conflation of vanguardism with consciousness and of spontaneity with reformism. Furthermore, Dunayevskaya argues, any attempts to argue that Lenin immediately turned back to vanguardism when the failure of the revolution was evident ignore the fact that the objective conditions had been radically changed and thus required a return to organization on a small, underground basis (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 182). That is, Lenin did not return to a conception of the party as an elitist organization meant to guide the masses; instead, he continually insisted upon the importance of broad-based democratic action even while the Russian situation demanded that this activity be sent underground.

When the revolution broke out in March of 1917, Lenin witnessed the spontaneous recreation of the Soviets. These democratic bodies represented not only a new form of decision making but a new form of life for Lenin. It was only with their appearance, and continued presence even after the removal of the Tsar, that Lenin realized their true potential and the fact that only they had the potential to provide stability in the aftermath of the revolution. Dunayevskaya notes that this represents yet another breakthrough for Lenin; rather than breaking with Kautskyan orthodoxy, this time he was breaking from his self—from all of the positions he held before finally recognizing the true nature of the Soviets (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 189).

If this is the case, it should be possible to recognize the influence that this break had on Lenin's policies after the revolution. Dunayevskaya argues that there is ample evidence, both in policy positions and internal debates, to suggest that this break did in fact change the way Lenin thought. She points to the dispute over the relationship between the new workers' state and the trade unions that took place between 1920 and 1921 as the key example of this change. During this debate, Lenin opposed the statism of Leon Trotsky and the syndicalism of Alexander Shlyapnikov. Trotsky proposed subsuming the trade unions under the power of the state. Shlyapnikov proposed the opposite: placing the state under the rule of the trade unions. What Lenin suggested was placing the unions under the management of the state with the requirement that the unions serve as "schools of communism" (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 196).

How did Lenin's position differ from Trotsky's and why did he reject Shlyapnikov's suggestion? First, Lenin rejected the idea that the Soviet Union was a workers' state in any pure sense. Instead, he suggested that "the entirely organized proletariat must protect itself and must utilize the workers organizations for the purpose of protecting the workers from their own state and in order that the workers may protect our state" (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 198). If it were the case that the Soviet Union was a workers' state, in a pure form, it would not be necessary for workers to seek protection from it; furthermore, according to Lenin's position on the withering away of the state, the task at hand would be dismantling the workers' state—not adding to it. That is, Lenin recognized that the dictatorship of the proletariat had not yet been firmly established and could not be done by laying hold of bureaucratic state machinery. Instead, by viewing the trade unions as "schools of communism," Lenin hoped that these organizations could work in opposition to the emerging bureaucratic state and push toward the establishment of a true workers' state.

Second, Shlyapnikov's position also made the assumption of the existence of a workers' state in the Soviet Union. Thus, Lenin's critique of Shlyapnikov was not that his position verged on anarchism but that it assumed that the revolutionary task of the workers had already been accomplished.⁵ What is meant by this is that Shlyapnikov held that since a workers' state had already been established, there was no need for political leadership and all matters could simply be referred to a "producers' congress." Lenin viewed this as a move that would certainly weaken the already fragile prospects of establishing a workers' state in the chaotic conditions that the Soviet Union found itself in during its early years (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 199). In this sense, Lenin's position was a pragmatic one—not an ideological one. He opposed both Trotsky and Shlyapnikov for assuming the existence of

(the abstract idea of) a workers' state rather than looking at the concrete situation of a majority peasant country that had recently been torn apart by two wars.

It is critical to note that Lenin's position was hardly what one would typically label as *Leninist*. Furthermore, it is very easy to label Shlyapnikov's position as the more democratic position rooted as it is in the idea of rule of, by, and for the masses. However, given Lenin's practical concerns about the survival of the newly founded society, contemporary critics ought to be careful in coming to such a judgment grounded on abstract principles of either a workers' state or radical democracy for the sake of radical democracy. Lenin's position avoided these abstractions, yet it also avoided the bureaucratization and trend toward authoritarianism that Trotsky's position embodied. The demand that the trade unions serve as a check on the bureaucratic state (i.e., serve as schools of communism) was a pragmatic way to ensure both the survival of the institutions established by the revolution and the radical nature of shop floor democracy embodied in both the trade unions and the Soviets.

The State Capitalism Thesis and Bureaucratic Capitalism

Despite the fact that Dunayevskaya and C.L.R. James recognize the democratic potential in Lenin's thought and practice, the fact remains that the Soviet Union became the opposite of what it (and Lenin) claimed to be striving for. Dunayevskaya and James recognized this as well and attempted to construct a theory that would take into account both the radically democratic potential of the Marxist tradition and the totalitarian legacy of the Soviet Union. One result of this was the state capitalism thesis, independently arrived at by both thinkers in the early 1940s. This thesis, which ran contrary to the position of communist parties around the globe (whether of a Stalinist or Trotskyist bent), allowed Dunayevskaya and James to understand the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a capitalist society. Meanwhile, Cornelius Castoriadis and a small group of former Trotskyists in France, some of them later involved with the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, were coming to a very similar conclusion about the state of the Soviet Union.

State Capitalism and World Revolution (1950) serves as the best example and the culmination of the work of both Dunayevskaya and James on the nature of the Soviet Union. In 1940, as the result of months of fighting within the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, James and Dunayevskaya left, along with Max Shactman and others, to form the Workers Party. James, Dunayevskaya, and Grace Lee Boggs formed the Johnson–Forest

Tendency within the Workers Party and worked toward elaborating a theory of state capitalism. Once it became clear that this theory was fundamentally incompatible with Shachtman's view of the Soviet Union as a bureaucratic collectivist society, another split occurred and the Johnson–Forest Tendency rejoined the Socialist Workers Party for the years 1947 through 1950 (at which point they left to form their own independent group, Correspondence). It was during this time that *State Capitalism and World Revolution* was written.

In this book, Dunayevskaya and James argue against both the Trotskyist assessment of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state (as argued for in *The Revolution Betrayed* [1937] and drawing upon Lenin's own characterization of the nascent Soviet Union as a "workers' state with bureaucratic distortions") and the Schachtmanite characterization of the Soviet Union as a bureaucratic collectivist society. What they offer instead is the argument that the Soviet Union was fundamentally a capitalist society, albeit a *state* capitalist society. Such a proposition rested on multiple claims. First, the Johnson–Forest position rejected the Stalinist notion that the abolition of private property was all that was required for the abolition of capitalist relations. Second, and related to the first claim, economically, the Soviet Union was still governed by the same laws of capitalism (particularly the notorious falling rate of profit). Third, the notion of state capitalism has precedence in the thought of Marx, Lenin, and Trotsky. Fourth, based on Lenin's expanded notion of bureaucracy, as presented in *The State and Revolution*, both the Soviet Union and the United States of America represent the theory of state capitalism in practice.

The first of these claims has its roots both in Marx's early humanist writings and in parts of *Capital*, but Dunayevskaya begins by noting the character of the teaching of political economy under Stalinism as evidence of the Soviet position on state property and socialism. She notes, drawing upon A. Leontiev's *Political Economy in the Soviet Union*, that the student of Marx's *Capital* could not find any fundamental differences between the categories described by Marx (e.g., money, wages, etc.) and the categories functioning in the Soviet Union. The response of the state was to claim that these categories existed before capitalism and were therefore not integral to capitalism and that they meant different things in different historical epochs. Because private property no longer existed in the Soviet Union, these categories could not possibly mean the same thing as they did under capitalism. Furthermore, the very structure of Marx's *Capital* was changed under Stalin in order to further distance Soviet reality from some of Marx's own criticisms of capitalism.

Why is it that Stalin was so concerned with distorting Marx's own writings in order to argue against the capitalist nature of the Soviet Union? The answer to this question is found in the claim that, because private property did not exist under the Soviet regime, there was no possibility of the Soviet Union having any characteristics of capitalism. Marx himself warned against this line of argument in his early writings. In the section labeled "Private Property and Communism" from the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844," Marx argues against what he considers the "crude communist" mistake of confusing the generalization of private property with the abolition or overcoming of private property. While this generalization is an improvement upon the miserable situation of propertylessness, it does not represent the positive transcendence of private property required by communism in its fullest form (Marx [1844] 1978, 82–84).⁶ One can easily transfer this critique to Stalinism in which one can view "the *community* as the universal capitalist." Marx repeats this idea with some variations again in Volume III of *Capital*, this time explicitly referring to this increasingly centralized economic form as capitalist in nature rather than crude communist. In this sense, it would be an illusion to even say that private property did not exist in Stalinist Russia; instead, through political sleight of hand, private property became generalized but never transcended, while capitalist relations remained intact.

This leads to Dunayevskaya and James's second claim, which is essentially an attempt to empirically validate the claim that Stalinism had not moved beyond essentially capitalist relations. Dunayevskaya first published a study of Stalin's Five Year Plans in *New International* between 1942 and 1943.⁷ The findings of this study were summarized in *State Capitalism and World Revolution* and again in *Marxism and Freedom*. Dunayevskaya argues that under the Five Year Plans, not only did Russia suffer from the trend of the falling rate of profit (that Marx argued was essential to the capitalist mode of production) but also from the problem of unemployment, which took the form of an explicitly planned reserve army of labor in the forced labor camps (James [1950] 1969, 21–24, 44–46). These claims lead to the conclusion that despite the statification of private property, the Soviet Union still operated as an essentially capitalist society.⁸

From here, Dunayevskaya and James attempt to validate this idea of state capitalism by turning to its precedence within the Marxist tradition. It is already clear that for Marx, crude communism merely replaces the individual capitalist with the community as capitalist; but Dunayevskaya and James were not the first post-Marx Marxists to seriously consider this idea. In fact, Lenin, Engels, and even Kautsky all discuss this concept in relation to the draft of the Erfurt Program.⁹ While Kautsky and Engels disagreed on

the relation of planning to capitalism, both made it clear that centralization, even to the point of statification, of capital did not represent a movement to socialism but in fact represented a new, intensified form of capitalism (James [1950] 1969, 25–26). Lenin agreed with this point, siding with Engels on the possibility of planned capitalism, and went so far as to call this stage of capitalism “state monopoly capitalism” (Lenin [1917] 1966, 322). In this sense, the Johnson–Forest Tendency was not venturing out into new territory by employing the language of state capitalism; what was new was the claim that the nature of the Soviet Union was neither a workers’ state (degenerated or otherwise) nor a bureaucratic collectivist society—it was a capitalist society.

The final claim made by Dunayevskaya and James is that state capitalism was not merely a Soviet phenomenon; instead, it signaled a new era in global capitalism. This claim rests on the notion that one of the key and unique elements of state capitalism is the logic of bureaucracy. Lenin describes the essence of bureaucracy as being the transformation of officials into “privileged persons divorced from the masses and *superior* to the masses” (Lenin [1917] 1966, 360). Furthermore, he recognized bureaucracy as an integral component of capitalism and, thus, viewed socialism as requiring the abolition of bureaucracy—generalizing private property without the abolition of private property and of bureaucracy leaves one within the paradigm of capitalist relations of production (James [1950] 1969, 37). In a sense, the Leninist conception of bureaucracy can be viewed along the same lines as the Weberian conception. Both thinkers believe that bureaucracy represents a hierarchical system of experts separated from the executors of the rules generated by this system; however, Lenin emphasizes the problematic nature of this separation and hierarchy in a way that Weber only hints at (Weber [1922] 1978).¹⁰

The existence of a bureaucratic element in Soviet society should thus be evidence enough that the Soviet Union had not overcome many of the contradictions of capitalism; but why use the same term to describe the United States? There is no argument that the United States was not a capitalist society at this point in time; but was it a state capitalist society? Of course the government was organized bureaucratically, as this seems to be the essence of the modern state, but one must look toward the bureaucratic elements in the process of production and their relationship to the state in order to address the questions proposed above. As Lenin noted, bureaucracy appears to be an integral part of capitalism. This is clear when one looks at the stratification in the workplace that creates divisions not only between the producers of wealth and the owners of wealth but also between workers and managers.

However, state capitalism also represents a new form of bureaucratization in the production process. In the United States, this takes the form of the labor bureaucracy that came about after the introduction of what James and Dunayevskaya refer to as the “totalitarian” techniques of Taylorism and Fordism in the first half of the 20th century. While many are comfortable with using the term “totalitarian” to describe fascist regimes or the Soviet Union under Stalin, it might seem unusual to refer to particular industrial management techniques as totalitarian. It is difficult to think of a better term to describe a system carried out “by means of a hired army (Bennett) of gangsters, thugs, supervisors who run production by terror, in the plant, in the lives of workers outside production, and in the political control of Detroit” (James [1950] 1969, 40). In this sense, one can easily recognize that this system of management is designed to control the totality of the workers’ activities—both inside and outside the workplace. Under this system, a labor bureaucracy arose that served as a mediating force between labor and management. Rather than representing the desires of the workers, it served to cover conflict between these two fundamentally opposed groups and replace it, just as Stalinism had done before, with a conflict between property and propertylessness. Any attempt by the workers to have control of production was systematically replaced with control over issues like wages and pensions. This, according to Dunayevskaya and James, is the basis of the welfare state. It moves conflict outside of the realm of production and into the realm of consumption. This, in turn, is a conflict that can be managed. A decrease in profit margins here and there for the sake of an increase in overall production is a much more palatable move for the owners of the means of production than an actual relinquishing of power. Meanwhile, the workers are seen as winning concessions from management, despite the fact that their true desires are not being fulfilled.¹¹ This is all a direct result of the emergence of a labor bureaucracy that stands outside of and above the workers proper. It is for this reason that Dunayevskaya and James point to both the Soviet Union and the United States as following the logic of state capitalism. This logic is one of bureaucratic mediation in the realm of production that places the state in a position to direct the economy through regulation and planning but does very little to actually overcome the contradiction between labor and capital.

Expanding the Critique of Bureaucracy

Cornelius Castoriadis focused his critique on these bureaucratic elements of Soviet society. One of the greatest examples of this critique is in the first

of his essays “On the Content of Socialism.” These essays, written between 1955 and 1958, begin with the premise of a rejection of bureaucratic society (whether in the form of labor bureaucracy, the state, or even the traditional Marxist parties) and attempt to construct an alternative from this basis. Castoriadis starts by presenting the observations of a hypothetical Marxist militant and worker:

He sees the so-called Socialist parties participating in bourgeois governments, actively repressing strikes or movements of colonial peoples, and championing the defense of the capitalist fatherland while neglecting even to make reference to a socialist system of rule. He sees the Stalinist “communist” parties sometimes carrying out this same opportunistic policy of collaborating with the bourgeoisie and sometimes an “extremist” policy, a violent adventurism unrelated to a consistent revolutionary strategy. The class-conscious worker makes the same discoveries on the level of his working-class experience. He sees the socialists squandering their energies trying to moderate his class’s economic demands, to make any effective action aimed at satisfying these demands impossible, and to substitute interminable discussions with the boss or the State for the strike. He sees the Stalinists at certain times strictly forbidding strikes (as was the case from 1945 to 1947) and even trying to curtail them through violence, or frustrating them underhandedly, and at other times trying to horsewhip workers into a strike they do not want because they perceive that it is alien to their interests (as in 1951–52, with the “anti-American” strikes).

(Castoriadis [1955] 2009)

Like James and Dunayevskaya, Castoriadis recognizes something problematic in the bureaucratic mediation of labor struggles and Marxist politics. Furthermore, he argues that it is quite unnecessary to argue against reformist policies from a Marxist perspective, as that issue has already been addressed by revolutionaries from various tendencies; instead, the real target of his critique is the Stalinist bureaucracy. Also abandoning the Trotskyist perspective of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers’ state, Castoriadis argues for an understanding of Stalinist Russia as a bureaucratic capitalist society, a class society with the fundamental division existing between the workers and the bureaucracy (or executants and directors as he would later say [Castoriadis (1957) 1988, 91]). By defining the bureaucracy as a class, Castoriadis moved beyond the rigid Marxist analysis that could only envision a move from capitalist class divisions to a classless society. Further, this analysis points toward the fact that it is

indeed the interest of the bureaucracy, as the ruling class, that defined the interest of the Soviet state.

This position differs from the claim of the state capitalism thesis, which argues for capitalist class relations mediated by the state and bureaucracy, but still recognizes the same fundamental issue of bureaucratic logic as the core of the Soviet Union's problems. Castoriadis does not engage in an economic analysis in order to prove that the Soviet Union is a capitalist society; instead, he points toward the fact that the Stalinist bureaucracy makes all of the decisions both inside and outside of the workplace. Like Dunayevskaya and James, he refers to this method of domination as totalitarianism. For the same reasons, he recognizes that bureaucratic totalitarianism represents the opposite of workers' management, which, as all three thinkers contend, is the core of socialism. Thus, the new contradiction to be overcome, for Castoriadis, is the one between bureaucracy and democracy. The possibility for this transcendence is discussed below.

Creative Impulses and Grassroots Mobilization

Another result of the Johnson–Forest attempt to reconcile Marxist theory with the objective conditions of world capitalism was an intense focus on studying workers' democracy wherever it showed its face. Like Lenin and Marx before them, Dunayevskaya and James looked toward practice in order to refine their own theory. Where Marx had the Paris Commune of 1871 and Lenin had the failed Russian revolution of 1905 to draw from, Dunayevskaya and James had the struggles taking place in U.S. labor circles throughout the middle of the 20th century and the events unfolding in Hungary in 1956. They were joined in these observations by the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* circle, especially Cornelius Castoriadis.¹² The writings that were the result of these observations represent an important moment in 20th century Marxism due to their optimism and faith in democratic action at a time when the world seemed torn between two equally unattractive and undemocratic ways of life.¹³ Furthermore, the conclusions reached regarding the nature of the Soviet Union and the United States required these thinkers to return to both the writings of Marx and to mass struggles in order to reformulate a vision for the future.

Rank and File Labor and the Struggle against Automation: The U.S. Miners' Strike of 1949 to 1950

Dunayevskaya and James engaged in a critical analysis of American labor struggles at a time when an emerging labor bureaucracy appeared to be

stifling any move toward a more revolutionary position by the largest unions in the nation.¹⁴ For Dunayevskaya, this analysis culminated in her chapter entitled “Automation and the New Humanism” in *Marxism and Freedom*. She begins this chapter with a quote from Marx on the importance of understanding technology in order to understand humanity’s relationship with nature—i.e., the mode of production—and therefore all social relations and mental conceptions thereof. Immediately, she moves to discussing the idea of automation, an idea that found its reality with the introduction of the continuous miner in the spring of 1949. The result of the introduction of automation was a nine-month strike that turned miners against both their employers and the existing labor bureaucracy.

What was it about this new technology, this new method of production, that brought about such a strong reaction from the workers and what was it exactly that these miners saw themselves as doing by engaging in such a strike? To answer the first question, Dunayevskaya turns to the label applied to the continuous miner by the miners themselves: “a man killer” (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 267). It was a man killer not only for the obvious reason that it represented a hazard in the workplace, but, Dunayevskaya notes, it was man killer in a “total” way. That is, the workers saw the continuous miner as something that posed a safety risk in the workplace, sought to replace individual workers with machines, and also transformed the way the miners themselves acted upon nature. That is, in keeping with the quote from Marx, the workers realized that this new technology represented a new way of acting and living; furthermore, this new way of living led to an increase in alienation both inside and outside of the workplace.

The answer to the second question is also found by turning directly to the workers. Dunayevskaya, who was on the ground interviewing the striking miners at the time, offers up the following quote in order to describe what it was the workers saw themselves as doing:

There is a time for praying. We do that on Sundays. There is a time for acting. We took matters in our hands during the Depression, building up our union and seeing that our families did not starve. There is a time for thinking. The time is now. What I want to know is: how and when will the working man—all working men—have such confidence in their own abilities to make a better world that they will not let others do their thinking for them.

(Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 267)

Again, it is evident here that this was not simply a strike over wages or a new workplace hazard; it was a strike over exactly what type of work these

workers ought to be doing. The miners were taking the time to consider what the answer to this question was, rather than having it be decided by either their employers or the union bureaucrats that seemed to be betraying them at every turn. In doing so, the miners were seeking to erase the division between theory and practice, between thinking and doing. Dunayevskaya recognizes this striving as the “innermost core of Marxism” and argues that the division can only be mediated by seeking a new form of labor, not simply increasing leisure time or transferring the ownership of production (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 275).

Such an argument coincides with Dunayevskaya’s interpretation of the failure of the Russian revolution and the advent of state capitalism. While Marx and Lenin’s observations of the spontaneous activity of the masses allowed both of them to move beyond traditional conceptions of parliamentary democracy, Dunayevskaya’s observation of the American labor movement solidified her understanding of Marx’s critique of vulgar communism. That is, these observations pointed toward the fact that socialism is not merely a question of the nationalization of the means of production but is instead a question of the control over fundamental aspects of everyday life (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 284).¹⁵

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956

If observations of the American labor movement pointed toward this fact, the example of the Hungarian workers’ councils made these claims explicit. It is only with the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 that the spontaneous activity of the masses brought the truth of the Marxist project to light.¹⁶ The workers’ councils went beyond the notions of parliamentary democracy, the division between mental and physical labor, and the necessity of leadership in a way that nobody, not even the keenest of Marxist intellectuals, could have anticipated. In *Facing Reality* (1958), C.L.R. James, along with co-author Grace Lee Boggs, discusses the truly revolutionary potential of this movement that stood up to Soviet power for just over two weeks before losing the military and political struggles, being forced to fight the battle solely on economic grounds until mid-1957.

James begins the text with the following claim:

The secret of the Workers Councils is this. From the very start of the Hungarian Revolution, these shop floor organizations of the workers demonstrated such conscious mastery of the needs, processes, and interrelations of production that they did not have to exercise any domination over *people*. That mastery is the only basis of political power

against the bureaucratic state. It is the very essence of any government which is to be based upon general consent and not on force. The administration of things by the Workers Councils established a basic coherence in society and from this coherence they derived automatically their right to govern. Workers' management of production, government from below, and government by consent have thus been shown to be one and the same thing.

(James [1958] 1968, 7)

Before discussing the concrete activities of the workers' councils, it is important to dissect what James saw as their secret. First, there is a claim that the conscious mastery of production by the producers eliminates any need for domination of people. Second, the mastery of things in this manner provides a basis for governing people in a way that is directly opposed to the bureaucratic state. Third, the mastery of things is one and the same as true democratic governance. James's discussion of the councils in action ought to be analyzed in the context of these claims in order to discuss their meaning and validity.

The first idea to be addressed is what James refers to as the mastery of production or the administration of things by the workers. What exactly did this involve and how did it differ from the administration of things by either the state or private employers? The first element that James touches on is the spontaneous and decentralized nature of workers' management. From the very first days in late October 1956, the actions at factories around the country were coordinated not from above but by the independent activities of workers at individual factories. James states: "General strikes have played a decisive role in bringing down governments in every modern revolution, but never before has the general been initiated and controlled so completely by the particular" (James [1958] 1968, 7). He makes this claim in such a way that the reader should not just assume that this coordination was merely a happy coincidence; instead, there was a real unity and coherence present in the workers that, when allowed to realize itself, made itself known through coordinated action from below. Beyond the general strike, workers began producing arms in one factory and sending them to the striking workers at the other factories in order to create a people's army to stand against the state forces. James views this as a clear manifestation of the Marxist conception of production for use rather than exchange. Furthermore, the workers at all factories took control of the processes of hiring, planning, and paying—in doing so, James argues that they exposed the "essential simplicity of the modern economy" (James [1958] 1968, 9).

How exactly does this mastery of production relate to democratic governance of society? James argues that they are one and the same, but why? In order to answer these questions, it is important to look at what democratic governance during these two weeks looked like. One of their first actions was to reinstate Imre Nagy (who had been removed from office by Soviet fiat in 1955) as the leader of the national government. James makes it quite clear that the national government did not occupy a position of equality with the workers' councils. Instead, it was the workers' councils that represented the ultimate authority in Hungary; it was the workers' councils that held the power to decide "who should occupy government posts, who should be dismissed, which ministries should be retained, which should be dissolved" (James [1958] 1968, 9). In taking on this role, the workers' councils became organs of industrial and governmental democracy. It seems then that the relationship between mastery of production and democratic governance is that they both spring from the same source in this case. Despite what some of James's wording might point to, it is not that the activities themselves are one and the same; rather, the activities, if they are to be authentically revolutionary (that is, if they are in fact going to serve the interests of human liberation), must both be present and they must both be the action not of external leadership but of the people themselves. In this way, by equating the two activities, James seeks to transcend the typical division between them, just as the striking miners had attempted to do six years prior.

Furthermore, in doing this, the councils obliterated the myth that the working class was only capable of carrying out a revolution under the guidance of a political party. James notes that it is not leadership that is the problem, for leadership existed within the councils themselves, rather it is leadership in the party form that represents a necessary "separation of the organizing intellectuals and workers with an instinct for leadership, from the masses as force and motive power" (James [1958] 1968, 10). This claim appears to be an extension of Lenin's post-1905 views on the vanguard party. While Lenin moved away from the notion of the party as an elite group of intellectuals and activists, James saw the workers' councils as abolishing the notion of the party in its entirety.¹⁷ This again points to the relationship between political and economic activity. By removing this separation between workers and political activists, the workers' councils were also able to remove the possibility of a political body that could in fact regulate and control the management of production. This makes concrete Marx and Lenin's sentiment that gaining control of the means of production requires the abolition of the state as such. If the state were to remain in existence (even in the

hands of representatives of the working class), the essentially hierarchical and external nature of governance would remain unchanged and the path toward entrenching the state capitalist form would be embarked on once again.

Dunayevskaya also included some commentary on the Hungarian revolt in *Marxism and Freedom*. For Dunayevskaya the revolt signaled mass dissatisfaction with both Russia and the satellite regime in Hungary and a yearning for real freedom (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 257). Even in the last words transmitted from a free Hungary, Dunayevskaya sees hope:

Death and starvation stalked the streets of Hungary as the rebel radio station sent out its last S.O.S.: "We are quiet. Not afraid. Send the news to the world." The news to the world about five days of freedom revealed more than courageous fighting. It showed that the idea of freedom cannot be killed. That idea does not float in heaven. People live by that idea. Overnight, the One Party system disintegrated and various political parties reappeared along with small newspapers and radio stations. Hundreds of local and district organizations, from the Hungarian Revolutionary Youth Party to old parties, including both the Smallholders and Social Democrats, appeared.

(Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 255)

It is here that Dunayevskaya sees the real triumph of the Hungarian revolution. The resilience of the Hungarian youth fighting Soviet soldiers in the street was astounding; the self-organization and general strike emanating from the factories was more groundbreaking, but it was the effect both of these moments had on Hungarian society at large that she finds most inspiring. In those five brief days between the retreat of the Soviet tanks and the final assault upon Hungarian self-government, the streets of Budapest and elsewhere exploded with revolutionary activity. This activity showed that the Hungarian people still desired freedom and would live in freedom when the chance came, despite years of Soviet totalitarianism. The fact that dormant organizations sprang to life and that new organizations were created was indicative of this fact.

A Libertarian Marxist Democratic Theory?

All of these observations—the underlying democratic potential of Marxism (even of the Leninist variety), the theoretical analysis of the Soviet Union and the United States as bureaucratic, state capitalist societies, and

the analysis of spontaneous workers' democracy—point toward what one might label a libertarian Marxist democratic theory. What is meant by this term and why is it suggested here? First, the term situates the subject within the tradition of libertarian socialism that has existed (explicitly at least) since Proudhon but has also shown up among council communists, radical syndicalists, and left opposition groups. Second, it distinguishes the subject from some other varieties of libertarian socialism in that it maintains distinctly Marxist characteristics. Third, the subject that is being pointed toward is in fact meant to be a robust, positive democratic theory. That is, all of these observations ought to be pointing the reader toward an understanding of a radical democratic politics that is firmly rooted in the Marxist tradition yet remains wary of any use (and potential abuse) of state power. Again, it is important to note that these observations point the reader toward such a theory; that is, the ideas expressed by Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis suggest ways in which we might reconsider existing democratic theory from a libertarian Marxist perspective.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, libertarian socialism has long been an integral part of the Marxist tradition.¹⁸ Throughout its history, this branch of Marxist theory and activism has sought to realize radical democracy parallel to or in competition with existing state based institutions. This has taken the form of the Soviets during the 1905 and 1917 revolutions, wildcat strikes calling for a unification of theory and practice in the American context, and the Hungarian workers' councils that demonstrated how an entire country could be run on a horizontal basis. But what can these activities tell us about democracy itself? Are there generalizable lessons to be drawn from the experiences discussed above?

The first lesson to be learned is that democracy of this type stands in direct opposition to the democracy of the bureaucratic state. Bureaucracy, whether present in the realm of production or of governance, requires a strict hierarchical relationship between rulers and ruled. Such a relationship runs contrary to the demands of a democratic imagination that desires more than the Aristotelian conception of ruling and being ruled in turn. Indeed, from Marx through Lenin and onward to James, Dunayevskaya, and Castoriadis, the Marxist democratic project has sought to do away with ruling as such. Where bureaucracy seeks to remove decision making from the hands of those carrying out the decisions, this project, like the miners demanding a unification of theory and practice, seeks to do away with such a division. It does away with the notion of representation that Laclau and Mouffe find so problematic in the Marxist tradition of hegemony. Furthermore, it excludes

the possibility of parliamentary reformism as it rejects the notion of a democratic state as an oxymoron. A politics of this variety then might look something like a radicalized version of the Arendtian notion of acting in concert with one's equals.

The second lesson that can be taken from both the American workers and the Hungarian councils is that this sort of democracy cannot be limited to particular spheres of activity—whether these are political or economic in nature. The words of Lenin, that revolutionary consciousness could only be attained by understanding the relationship between all spheres of life, came alive in these short moments of spontaneous democratic action. Unlike the Arendtian version of politics that relies upon and seeks to maintain distinctions between the public and the private, the political and the economic or social, etc., this conception of democracy requires that one recognize the fundamentally artificial and limiting nature of such distinctions in favor of a view of human activity as interconnected, interdependent, and admittedly messy.

An explicit discussion of these aspects of this form of Marxist democratic activity can be found in the final two parts of Castoriadis's "On the Content of Socialism." Drawing from the analysis of *Facing Reality*, Castoriadis reminds the reader that the core of socialism is workers' management of production and the rule of the councils (Castoriadis [1957] 1988, 95). This requires full transparency, from the shop floor to local political bodies, and direct democratic rule; he refers to this as "nothing other than people's conscious self-organization of their own lives in all domains" (Castoriadis [1958] 1988, 155). Although Castoriadis calls for what seems like a radical decentralization with the creation of local bodies to decide upon economic, political, and cultural matters, he also echoes Lenin's call for democratic centralization. He notes that centralization itself is not the cause of alienation in modern society; instead, it is bureaucratic centralization that seeks to separate independent bodies and control them from without. Castoriadis seeks to repair this through anti-bureaucratic politics that recognize the intimate relationship between all aspects of life. Castoriadis notes that this was the goal of the Hungarian councils: an understanding of life as a coherent whole to be controlled by those actually living it.

Castoriadis goes on to explain, in line with the historical Marxist tradition and the observations of both the striking miners and the Hungarian workers' councils, that the socialist project is rooted in the transformation of work itself (Castoriadis [1957] 1988, 103). As such, this project must begin with a transformation of the workplace but cannot end there. Workers' management in the factory must also extend to management of the

economy and of society; that is, it must break down bureaucracy at all levels and in all spheres of life—eradicating the false distinctions between these spheres in the process. What this looks like in practice will obviously be a matter of historical contingency, but Castoriadis offers some guidelines in the traditional fashion of political theorists from Plato until today. These specifics are of little importance in establishing what might be conceived of as a libertarian Marxist democratic theory, but some general themes are quite relevant.

First, traditional functions of the state will disappear along with the form of the state. That is, Castoriadis argues, repression and constraint will give way to a radically new notion of freedom that exceeds formal “democratic freedoms” as they exist in liberal states and open up the terrain of substantive freedom in which one is actually capable of making real choices about what one wants to do with one’s life (Castoriadis [1957] 1988, 145). This is obviously connected with the overcoming of capitalism and the introduction of worker management in the factory but is only truly possible once this has been extended to the abolition of the bureaucratic state. This ought to make clear what is meant by extending democracy to all spheres of life or overcoming the distinction between theory and practice as discussed above.

Furthermore, the abolition of the bureaucratic state, which, as noted by Lenin, is the first objective of socialist revolution, will result in the establishment of democratic centralism. What this means, for Castoriadis, is that “the network of general assemblies and councils is all that is left of the *State* or of *power* in a socialist society. It is the *whole* state and the *only* embodiment of power” (Castoriadis [1957] 1988, 132). This is an absolute rejection of any attempt to place either a party or a bureaucratic apparatus above or outside the activities of those engaged in both making and carrying out decisions. This network can only be made up of such individuals and thus serves as the embodiment of the desires of miners to unite theory and practice as well as of Hungarian councils to forego the bureaucratic state in favor of substantive self-rule.

It may appear that such a notion of anti-bureaucratic democratic rule has a great deal in common with Laclau and Mouffe’s conceptualization of radical democracy. While this is true in many regards, this libertarian Marxist notion of democracy also differs from the radical democracy offered by Laclau and Mouffe. First, while Laclau and Mouffe claim that “it is only from the moment when the democratic discourse becomes available to articulate the different forms of resistance to subordination that the conditions will exist to make possible the struggle against different types of inequality,” the position being argued for here maintains

that the struggles themselves are a part of the formation of this discourse (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 154). To say that it is not until Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* that the antagonism between men and women truly comes into being represents an elitism just as dangerous as any form of vanguardism advocated by the Marxist left. Instead, this particular vision of democracy recognizes the discursive nature of power relations but locates discursive activity in spontaneous democratic action just as much as in the works of theoreticians and intellectuals. Furthermore, it fundamentally rejects subordination as such—unlike Laclau and Mouffe’s conception of a radically democratic politics, which draws distinctions between subordination, oppression, and domination. This fundamental rejection is tied to the rejection of bureaucracy, representation, and the state; each of these forms of subordination point to the fact that the essence of subordination is a transference of power to an external site. The post-Marxist position, for all of its talk of power and discourse, seems to brush over the intrinsically anti-democratic nature of such a transference. If democracy is of any value, it cannot be supposed that relations of subordination are any better than those relations of domination or oppression that have been articulated as points of antagonism. The goal of a radical democratic project ought to be to eliminate relations of subordination from the very beginning.

A second point of contention with post-Marxist variety of radical democratic politics is that while thinkers of this tradition seek to “deepen and expand” liberal-democratic ideology, a libertarian Marxist politics seeks to overcome liberalism (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 176). The idea of deepening and expanding an already faulty base is akin to Stalinism’s generalization of private property. It mistakes difference based on internal criteria for real contradictions between social antagonisms. Thus, deepening and expanding liberalism might include increasing the level of individual freedom (i.e., posing the problem as a continuum from freedom to unfreedom) without confronting and seeking to transcend the contradiction between state and individual that lies at the core of the problem. It seems then that radical democracy of the Laclau and Mouffe variety might be better described as hyper liberalism or deep liberalism—as radicalism denotes an appeal to the basic contradictions at play. On the other hand, the Marxist aspect of a libertarian Marxist politics demands that these contradictions be taken seriously in a way that moves beyond the language of deepening liberalism.

Finally, Dunayevskaya’s analysis of the Hungarian revolution points to the relationship between dialectical philosophy and radical democratic

action. In this way, she takes James's discussion to the next level. Where James stopped short of integrating the two, Dunayevskaya recognized their interdependence.¹⁹ In *Philosophy and Revolution*, she makes the claim that "the movement from practice is itself a form of theory" (Dunayevskaya 1973, 250). That is to say, the emergence of radical democratic practice does not reflect the end of philosophy but the birth of new philosophy. She notes that in the midst of the popular uprisings, new ideas and philosophies regarding freedom and human relations emerged. These new ideas in turn represented a new stage of cognition. While official party apparatuses made excuses and some intellectuals merely celebrated the fact of the uprisings, Dunayevskaya argued that their facticity pointed to new revolutionary subjectivity and to the shortcomings of the existing order (Dunayevskaya 1973, 255). It is here that Dunayevskaya's contribution to a libertarian Marxist democratic theory really shines. As Peter Hudis notes, Marxist theory fails if it stops short at mere celebration of these revolutionary moments without understanding that what is required next is the theoretical working out and unfolding of freedom (Hudis 2007). This then is the role of the anti-authoritarian Marxist theorist in today's age.

While the criticisms pointed out by Laclau and Mouffe do have merit, and are in fact appropriately targeted at a large segment of the Marxist tradition, it should be clear that there is in fact a vibrant democratic potential running like a thread in Marx's own work and in the work of his predecessors. Furthermore, the libertarian Marxist tradition may in fact be more capable of addressing issues of domination at their core. While this does not represent a fully articulated libertarian Marxist democratic theory, it is hoped that these preliminary comments point toward the potential of using a Marxist framework for establishing truly radically democratic alternatives to the existing statist paradigm.

Concluding Remarks

Three main strands of argument should have emerged throughout this chapter. First, the claim that authoritarianism is a necessary product of Marxist theory is a false one. Even Lenin, so often accused of authoritarianism, recognized the democratic potential inherent in the Marxist tradition. Second, Marxists from Marx to Lenin to Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis have located the true revolutionary and democratic potential of Marxism not in an intellectual elite but in the spontaneous activity of the masses. From the Paris Commune to the Hungarian workers' councils, mass activity has been recognized as that activity that represents the

potential unification of theory and practice. Third, it is possible to construct a vision of a democratic society based on observations of worker action under capitalist conditions. While none of the thinkers in question constructed or elaborated on a robust theory of democracy, it is possible to draw a rough sketch of what one might look like based on the observations of democracy in action.

The following chapter will attempt to ground this democratic theory in Dunayevskaya and James's reading of Hegel (and specifically, their reading of Lenin's reading of Hegel). This discussion will address the problem of historical necessity in Marxist thought in order to understand the role of subjectivity and agency in revolutionary and democratic activity. This will point toward an open conception of Marxism that has room for all of the contingencies that agency and democracy bring to the table. The next chapter will attempt to broaden the scope of exactly who it is that ought to be considered *the* revolutionary subject. Taking seriously Marx's conception of a "true people's revolution," the writings of Dunayevskaya and James on race and gender will be discussed and evaluated in the hope of expanding the traditional Marxist conception of the proletariat as revolutionary subject. This discussion will hopefully alleviate some of the concerns that post-structuralists might have with the representative notion of hegemony that is embodied in the Leninist project as it is typically construed. Finally, these three substantive chapters will be drawn together in order to offer some concluding observations on the fate of Marxism in a post-Marxist era.

Notes

- 1 The other problems that Laclau and Mouffe identify in the Marxist tradition are class essentialism and a crude materialist/deterministic explanation of human activity. Both of these issues will be addressed in the following chapters. All of these issues are intertwined but will be parsed separately for the sake of theoretical clarity. The final chapter will attempt to bring the responses to all three of these problems together again in order to present an alternative to existing Marxist responses to the questions posed by post-structuralism.
- 2 It should be noted that criticisms of an inherent authoritarianism of Marxist thought had been leveled by those on the left as early as Bakunin (*Statism and Anarchy*, 1873); however, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* has the advantage of nearly a century of hindsight when it comes to the failures of Marxism in practice. Further, Laclau and Mouffe make an argument about a tradition of Marxism rather than Marx's thought per se.
- 3 It is important to note that these claims were made in the face of heated controversy between Lenin and those socialists who favored spontaneity at the expense of socialist consciousness. Lenin was arguing for the need for socialist organization against individuals who believed that the spontaneous activity of the masses would automatically lead to socialism. In this sense, Lenin can be viewed as

arguing against the type of Marxism that views historical progress as unilinear and necessary; it is certain that he viewed himself as arguing against reformism (in the form of what he calls alternatively spontaneism and economism). Because of this, it becomes very difficult to parse out the different elements present in Lenin's argument. In fact, he seems to unite a disciplined vanguardism with the idea of consciousness and reformism with the idea of spontaneity. An attempt to separate these four elements will be made at a later point in this chapter.

- 4 In this way, the 1905 revolution served the same purpose for Lenin that the Paris Commune did for Marx. The action of the working class allowed both of these thinkers to elucidate in theory what occurred spontaneously in practice.
- 5 This is not to say that Lenin was not often critical of what he viewed as an anarchist opposition. However, his criticisms were usually rooted in a conflict over the role of the transitional dictatorship of the proletariat, not the goal of abolishing the state as such. Given this, there certainly are authoritarian elements to Lenin's thought that should not be simply dismissed because they coexist with other democratic elements in his later thought; the goal of this section is to argue that the democratic elements should also be considered for what they are. There will always be plenty to criticize in any political actor, but to dismiss Lenin's thought as inherently, necessarily, and wholly authoritarian is intellectually dishonest at the very least.
- 6 The problem with crude communism is that it poses an opposition between propertylessness and property rather than between labor and capital. This leads to the generalization of property but places society itself in the position of the capitalist; meanwhile, particular laborers still remain exploited by this fundamentally unequal relationship.
- 7 *New International* was a journal of American Trotskyism between 1934 and 1958. It is in these writings that Dunayevskaya first presented the idea of the era of state capitalism.
- 8 These are certainly controversial claims. Castoriadis was quite critical of Dunayevskaya's economic arguments, despite the fact that he agreed with many of the conclusions regarding bureaucracy, capitalism, and democracy. The point here is not to make an economic argument but simply to outline the Johnson-Forest position on the matter.
- 9 The Erfurt Program replaced the Gotha Program, drafted in 1875, which was the result of compromise between Lassalleans and Marxists. While the Erfurt Program was definitely more Marxist in character, this did not stop Engels and others from criticizing it.
- 10 Part of the reason for this may be that Weber viewed bureaucracy as problematic yet necessary while Lenin viewed it as completely unnecessary once capitalism is overcome.
- 11 The use of this term, "true desires," should not be taken as a reference toward any conception of false consciousness or of a Marxist vanguard knowing what working people really want. Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis engaged in a series of ethnographic studies of workers, and a discussion of these true desires occurs below.
- 12 Concerning the idea of a linkage between these two groups, Castoriadis, in his "C. L. R. James and the Fate of Marxism," noted that "I became acquainted with James and the whole Tendency because we were looking in very much the same way at what appeared to us as the main thing: the self-activity of the working class."
- 13 It is important to remember that although the Johnson-Forest Tendency considered both the Soviet Union and the United States to be functioning according to state capitalist logic, they never once claimed that this meant the two countries

were identical. Instead, following Marx's claim that "the country that is more developed only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future," they argue that Russia is the extension of the logic of American capitalism. While Marx uses the language of necessary temporality, the logical claim need not require that the United States will one day become a totalitarian nation in the same sense as the Soviet Union.

- 14 One of the highlights of this type of writing to come out of the Johnson–Forest Tendency in the late 1940s is *The American Worker*. This pamphlet, written by Grace Lee Boggs and Paul Romano (an American auto worker), focuses on the struggles taking place in the automotive industry and fuses the observations of a worker with the critical analysis of a Marxist intellectual. Unfortunately, due to its authorship and the scope of the project at hand, the pamphlet will not be discussed at length here.
- 15 For a recent study of the American workplace, see Tom Juravich's *At the Altar of the Bottom Line* (Juravich 2009). This work applies a similar ethnographic style using in depth interviews in order to draw out a workers' analysis of the conditions of modern capitalism. Of particular interest is Juravich's chapter on workers at a Verizon call center in Massachusetts. This chapter discusses the application of Taylorism to service industry jobs. Many of the conclusions that Juravich's interviewees arrive at are very similar to those expressed by the miners described by Dunayevskaya.
- 16 By this point, Dunayevskaya had split from James and Boggs, but all of them viewed the Hungarian Revolution with hopeful eyes.
- 17 The position being staked out here then is in opposition to the recent work of Jodi Dean (2012), which argues for the revival of the party form. While Dean is ambiguous about what exactly she means by the term "party," she uses the language of Marxism–Leninism in order to argue for its importance. In a 2013 interview, Dean refers to the party as a collective that "bring[s] together people with different skills, experience, and knowledge." If this is what she means by party, it is unclear why she draws upon the Leninist heritage of the vanguard party and insists upon such nomenclature.
- 18 For a historically situated introduction to this tradition, see "A Libertarian Marxist Tendency Map" on www.libcom.org (<http://libcom.org/library/libertarian-marxist-tendency-map>). This document attempts to connect the lines from Marx and Engels through the council communists, Rosa Luxemburg, and Lenin to contemporary tendencies such as Open Marxism and Italian Autonomist Marxism.
- 19 Peter Hudis (2007) argues that James aborts the philosophical project at exactly this moment. He points to chapter four of *Facing Reality* in which James argues that philosophy itself has come to an end with the emergence the Hungarian workers' councils. Hudis traces this sentiment back to *Notes on Dialectic* in which James cuts the Hegelian project short by fetishizing the spontaneous form of organization. Ultimately this position has the potential to reduce dialectical philosophy to the role of record keeper of democratic activity.

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3 Hegel as Revolutionary

Reconsidering Marxism's Philosophical Heritage

The relationship between Marxism and Hegelian philosophy has been an unsettled issue since the time of Marx's death. The history of the Marxist tradition is full of attempts to either rid Marxism of Hegel's bourgeois influence or to restate the importance of Hegel's thought for Marxist theory. This chapter can be viewed as simply one more attempt at the latter; however, it should not be considered yet another attempt to reinvent the wheel. Instead, this exercise is being carried out in order to demonstrate the resilience and profound flexibility that Marxism's Hegelian inheritance provides—a resilience and flexibility that is denied in Laclau and Mouffe's critique. This chapter will first provide an overview of the post-structuralist critique of Marxism dependent upon orthodox conceptions of historical necessity and technological determinism. Second, building on Alvin Gouldner's concept of "the two Marxisms," a brief history of critical Marxism will be provided in order to show where past attempts at reconciling Marxism with its Hegelian influences have succeeded and where they have fallen short. Third, Raya Dunayevskaya and C.L.R. James's unique and critical appropriation of Hegelian dialectics will be examined in order to point to the fundamentally open and dynamic nature of Marxism as a system of thought. Finally, the post-Marxist critique of Marxism's closed nature will be responded to using the tools provided by Dunayevskaya and James's versions of Hegelian Marxism.

Previously, I introduced the idea that the critique of Marxism offered up by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe rested on three main claims. First, there exists, within Marxist theory and practice, an unavoidable kernel of authoritarianism. Second, Marxist thought is unable to escape the problem of class essentialism and is thus unable to offer any real solution to the problems of capitalism as long as the working class remains fragmented. Third, Marx's own conception of materialism means that the Marxist tradition is bound to historical necessity and economic/technological determinism. The previous chapter presented a response to the

first claim by presenting the case for an equally unavoidable, radically democratic core at the center of Marxist thought. The next chapter will address the problem of class essentialism and revolutionary subjectivity, especially in terms of race and gender. However, at this point, it is important to address Marxism's philosophical heritage and Marx's own materialism in order to dispel the myth of Marxism's teleological drive and crude determinism. This investigation will not only carry out this primary function of presenting Marxism as a fundamentally open and dynamic system but will also serve to reinforce the arguments made in chapters two and four.

Post-Structuralism, Totality, and Necessity

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe offer one of the most cogent critiques of historical materialism from the left. This critique is based on the blend of Nietzschean anti-foundationalism, Althusserian overdetermination, and Foucauldian discourse theory that marks the brand of post-structuralism advanced in their work. From this starting point, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the Marxist tradition depends upon a determinist and crude materialist understanding of historical development that is incapable of grappling with contingent reality. This problem, according to the authors, is evident from the crisis of Marxism at the turn of the 20th century but is ultimately rooted in a flawed ontology. Because of this, they claim that it is actually impossible to escape from this problem while remaining within a Marxist paradigm.

This flawed ontology finds its origins in the thought of the thinker that Laclau and Mouffe locate at the boundaries of German Romanticism and post-Enlightenment thought: Hegel. It is in Hegel that they find the relationship between *articulation* and *mediation* coming to a head. Laclau and Mouffe enter into this conversation by suggesting that modern thought is characterized by a rejection of the ancient notion of society as a natural and organic unity. In the quest for an artificial unity, modern thinkers are presented with two options: the first presents the suggested organization as contingent and "external to the fragments themselves"; the second suggests that both the organization and the fragments are necessary moments of a transcendent totality (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 94). The first moment can be understood as a relation of articulation, while the second can only be mediation. For Laclau and Mouffe, Hegel seems to want both of these ideas up and running simultaneously; however, they argue, it is impossible to think of this relationship as one of externality and contingency *and* as one grounded on a closed totality.

This problem is played out in the history of the Marxist tradition that adopted its dialectical logic from Hegel. By attempting to understand the social totality as totality, according to Hegelian logic, Marxists are doomed to failure from the beginning. Louis Althusser attempted to move beyond the problem established by the Hegelian insistence on incorporating contingency and necessity under the concept of totality by introducing the idea of overdetermination,¹ but he ultimately resorted to the idea of determination by the economy in the last instance.² Laclau and Mouffe argue that this represents a clear move toward the logic of necessity. Instead of various fragments engaging in external and contingent relationships with an organization seeking to create artificial unity, determination in the last instance requires that these fragments enter into a necessary and determined relationship established by the “sutured space of the rationalist paradigm” (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 99). What this means is that rather than alleviating the problem, Althusser’s conception of overdetermination serves to highlight the inconsistency that has been present in the Hegelian conception of the social totality from the very beginning. For this reason, Laclau and Mouffe go on to claim the following:

The incomplete character of every totality necessarily leads us to abandon, as a terrain of analysis, the premise of “*society*” as a sutured and self-defined totality. “Society” is not a valid object of discourse. There is no single underlying principle fixing—and hence constituting—the whole field of differences. The irresoluble interiority/exteriority tension is the condition of any social practice: necessity only exists as a partial limitation of the field of contingency. It is in this terrain, where neither a total interiority nor a total exteriority is possible, that the social is constituted.

(Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 111)

This appears to be one of their central claims. The Hegelian inheritance of Marxism requires that the contradiction between necessity and contingency be brought to the forefront. According to Laclau and Mouffe, this contradiction cannot be resolved, and Marxism consistently falls back on the logic of necessity and of determinism (even if only in the last instance). What this means is that Marxism, even in its most complex varieties, is guided by a conception of history that is always already determined by its own internal movement (which, according to Laclau and Mouffe, can only be mediation and thus dependent upon necessity rather than contingency). This is evidenced most clearly, according to Laclau and Mouffe, by the impossible struggle at the turn of the

20th century to reconcile Marxism's dependence on the working class as the revolutionary subject with the fact of a fragmented working class. By deconstructing the idea of society as the object of analysis, Laclau and Mouffe argue that the field of the social is opened up and the interiority/exteriority tension (a product of the contingency/necessity tension) is avoided altogether. The political downside of Laclau and Mouffe's position is that it lends itself to a politics of difference that is little more than a more inclusive form of liberal individualism (Day 2005, 75–76)—in this sense, the similarity between Laclau and Mouffe's claim and Margaret Thatcher's statement that there is no such thing as society should not be surprising at all.

The question remains as to whether or not this criticism is valid. Is it the case that, by virtue of its "rationalist inheritance," the Marxist tradition cannot overcome its own contradictions? Furthermore, do Laclau and Mouffe offer up an accurate description of Hegelianism and its shortcomings? In order to answer these questions, it is necessary to turn to some of the more prominent Marxist interpretations of Hegelian thought.

The Origins of Critical Marxism

Is it true that Marxism presents us with an insoluble problem? The entire history and development of the Marxist tradition, as Laclau and Mouffe also argue, have been an attempt to reconcile Marxist theory with a reality that just did not seem to match up. Unfortunately, Laclau and Mouffe do not treat this tradition with the care and nuance that it deserves. Because of this, it is critical to parse out some distinct elements within the larger Marxist tradition. One helpful way of doing so is by looking at the fundamentally different positions of Critical and Scientific Marxism as argued by Alvin Gouldner (1980).³ What is meant by, and what is not meant by, this distinction? First, the distinction is drawn between two fundamentally different ways of approaching Marxist theory. One attempts to use Marx's method (inherited from Hegel) in order to understand social reality; the other attempts to understand social reality through the lens of Marxist science. Second, it does not rely on geographical designations as a way of describing a method of thinking (as terms like "continental philosophy" or "Western Marxism" do). Third, it does not refer to a particular and contingent response to historical reality (again, the idea of "Western Marxism" comes to mind here). In other words, by focusing on technique and method, the terms Critical Marxism and Scientific Marxism actually tell us something about the particular thinker in question while avoiding the ambiguities of other, less descriptive terms.

According to Gouldner, Marxism has had both the critical element, as a theory of praxis, and the scientific element, as description of laws of capitalism, within it from the beginning. Gouldner's thesis is that these two elements have also been in tension with each other from the beginning and eventually developed into two different forms of doing Marxist theory. Gouldner counts people like Lukács, Gramsci, the early Frankfurt School, and Dunayevskaya among the Critical Marxists; Galvano della Volpe, Louis Althusser (and his followers), Goran Therborn, and Robin Blackburn find themselves among the Scientific Marxists.⁴ For Gouldner,

The difference between Critical and Scientific Marxism reflects a conflict between those viewing Marx as the culmination of German idealism and those emphasizing Marx's superiority to that tradition. It is, therefore, also a difference between those accepting the young (and consequently more Hegelian) Marx as authentically Marxist and others who regard the young Marx as still mired in ideology.

(Gouldner 1980)⁵

While Gouldner claims that both of these elements are important and equally legitimate parts of the Marxist tradition (with their own strengths and weaknesses), the present chapter is primarily concerned with Marxism's critical inheritance.

Lukács (1923): Hegel, History, and Orthodox Marxism

Critical Marxism finds its origins in the early writings of Karl Korsch and Georg Lukács. Korsch represents one of the first attempts to apply the Marxist (and Hegelian) method to Marxist philosophy itself (Korsch [1923] 1970). In doing so, he breaks from the dogmatism that had characterized much of Marxist thought up to this point and presents Marxism itself as a moment in the historical development of theory and practice. Lukács begins from a similar position, noting that it is the dialectical method that defines Marxism.⁶ He argues that even if all of Marx's individual theses were proven false, it is the dialectical method that remains (Lukács [1923] 1971, 1). This emphasis on Marx's Hegelian inheritance at the expense of a scientific understanding of the laws of history represents a breaking point in Marxism and the birth of Critical Marxist tradition. Another of the critical features and advances present in Lukács's work is the emphasis on consciousness as a response to the failures of official Marxism. This emphasis returned Marxism to its Hegelian heritage that emphasized the active, self-conscious subject.⁷ That said, Lukács does fall short for several reasons. Throughout

History and Class Consciousness, he continually pushes for an understanding of Marx as the inheritor and savior of German Idealism; however, his criticisms of Hegel as metaphysical and mythologizing recall the critiques of later Scientific Marxists such as Althusser. Lukács claims that Hegel “remained imprisoned in the Platonic and Kantian outlook, in the duality of thought and being, of form and matter, notwithstanding his very energetic efforts to break out” (Lukacs [1923] 1971, 17). To say that Hegel remains within a type of Platonic dualism, despite his attempt to escape, seems to miss a crucial point of Hegel’s thought. This will be discussed below, but it can briefly be noted that the Hegelian method requires an understanding of Hegel’s own rejection of dualism in favor of a dialectical logic grounded in identity, difference, contradiction, and negation.

Furthermore, Lukács’s overwhelming emphasis, in *History and Class Consciousness*, on the idea of totality can be viewed as problematic. Lukács conceived of the concept of totality as founded upon a historicist interpretation of the identical subject-object of Hegelian philosophy. The problem with this, as Lukács himself acknowledged in the preface to the 1967 edition, is that, despite his efforts to read Hegel in a materialist fashion, he ultimately fell back on a metaphysical construction that Hegel himself was careful to steer clear of. In this way, Lukács makes clear that “the proletariat seen as the identical subject-object of the real history of mankind is no materialist consummation that overcomes the constructions of idealism. It is rather an attempt to out-Hegel Hegel, it is an edifice boldly erected above every possible reality and thus attempts objectively to surpass the Master himself” (Lukacs [1923] 1971, xxiii). It is critical to note that in making these claims, Lukács is in fact pushing away from his own Hegelian past and moving toward the official Marxist positions endorsed by the party. In light of this, it is important to understand how Hegel conceived of the identical subject-object and how he was able to move beyond the concept of alienation while avoiding the snare of traditional metaphysics. This question is addressed below in the explication of C. L. R. James’s reading of Hegelian identity.

The First Generation of Frankfurt School Critical Theory in the 1930s and Beyond

The Institute for Social Research, commonly referred to as the Frankfurt School, was founded by Felix Weil, a student of Karl Korsch, in 1923. It served as the home for a variety of dissident Marxist scholars and became firmly established as the home of a new generation of critical theorists under the directorship of Max Horkheimer in 1930. These thinkers saw themselves as standing in firm opposition to the type of Scientific Marxism espoused

by the official communist and social democratic parties. This position was most clearly laid out in Horkheimer's "Traditional and Critical Theory" (1937). In this essay, Horkheimer argues against conceptions of Marxism as a positivist science and instead favors the idea of Marxism as critique; this required an emphasis on the epistemology and dialectical method of Marx and Hegel. While living in New York in 1941, Herbert Marcuse wrote *Reason and Revolution*, which will be taken as the prime example of the Frankfurt School's take on the critical approach to dialectics and the Marx/Hegel relationship.⁸ More importantly for this study, *Reason and Revolution* exerted a strong influence on both Dunayevskaya and James.

Reason and Revolution represents Marcuse's attempt to understand Hegel's dialectical method and its influence on social theory. He does this by presenting Hegel's method as a deeply historical one, not merely an abstract conceptual apparatus. He thus argues that *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807) represents Hegel's attempt to understand the movement toward human emancipation in light of the French Revolution and its aftermath; furthermore, he claims that the failure of the French Revolution to realize true human freedom is the reason for Hegel's retreat into the abstract philosophical categories of the *Phenomenology* (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 91–93). In this attempt, according to Marcuse, Hegel makes clear that "the way to truth is not only an epistemological but also a historical process" (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 99–100). He goes on to explain this by noting that "a mathematical truth may be arrested in one proposition; the proposition is true and its contradictory is false. In philosophy, the truth is a real process that cannot be put into a proposition" (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 100).⁹ By rejecting the notion of propositional truth in philosophy, Hegel attempts to present a notion of truth as having an active subject whose only object is its own self-movement. This, for Marcuse, is the core of dialectical philosophy; more importantly, it is the core of a dynamic reality that cannot be understood by either traditional logic or commonsense experience. This initial insight is reflected throughout the entirety of the *Phenomenology* as Hegel moves the reader along the path of both knowledge and history. The end result of this journey is a recognition of the interdependence of thought and reality. True freedom, then, cannot be mere self-sufficiency,¹⁰ as this would end the journey in stoicism; instead, Hegel's notion of freedom is a living freedom grounded on an active subject that recognizes itself as such. In this sense, according to Marcuse, what appears as a description of various types of thought is actually a description of the historical movement toward emancipation (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 118–120). Neither Lukács nor Marcuse needed to rewrite Hegelian dialectics in a historicist manner; Hegel had already done so from the beginning.

Marcuse's discussion of *The Science of Logic* returns to the issues of subjectivity and a critical understanding of history. Drawing upon the previous chapter, Marcuse emphasizes Hegel's use of the concept of negativity. In doing so, he highlights the critical element of Hegelian thought. By pointing first to Hegel's unity of Being and Nothing, Marcuse is able to show how Hegel himself emphasized the idea of negativity as "the basis and the element' of all that ensues" (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 131). From here, Marcuse is able to note that this unity brings the reader remarkably close to the Marxist idea of a critical theory of history. This is because such a unity means that "as a rule crisis and collapse are not accidents and external disturbances, but manifest the very nature of things and hence provide the basis on which the essence of the existing social system can be understood . . . the contradiction is the actual motor of the process" (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 148–149). This bears a striking resemblance to Marx's study of the internal contradictions inherent in all social forms.

Marcuse's treatment of contradiction and negativity requires an understanding of the dialectical relationship between necessity and contingency. Under formal logic,¹¹ necessity and contingency are viewed as irreconcilable opposites and thus the idea of inherent contradictions might construct an image of a closed system governed by necessity. However, Hegel's dialectical logic requires the reader to understand that the real always contains within it what is and what ought to be. In this sense, reality is always possibility—it is always contingent. A given social formation always contains within itself the possibility of its transcendence. A contingent reality becomes actualized through the necessary process of self-movement; it is necessary because it is the only possible way for this actualization to occur but not because it represents the only possible outcome. In this sense, Marcuse argues that "the dialectical interpretation of actuality does away with the traditional opposition between contingency, possibility, and necessity, and integrates them all as moments of one comprehensive process" (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 153). This ought to bring the reader back to the previous discussion of Lukács's conceptualization of totality and of philosophical truth being found in the whole of a process rather than in particular propositions. This idea, understood in conjunction with the discussion of the *Phenomenology*, presents Hegelian philosophy as the study of a self-conscious subject engaged in a continuous process of unfolding and becoming. Rather than relying on sets of propositions as traditional logic does or imagining itself as a closed system that is always rational and determined as some interpretations of Hegel do, Marcuse's interpretation of Hegelian philosophy represents a move toward an understanding of history as dynamic and subjective. This understanding moves him toward a discussion of Marx's concept of alienated labor under capital.¹²

This discussion begins with a rejection of the idea that estrangement of the subject from the object of its own creation has been overcome in the modern state. While Hegel argued that the Prussian state represents the actualization of reason and freedom (a goal that the French revolution was unable to accomplish), Marcuse and Marx explicitly reject such a proposition. The reason for doing so is found in Hegel's own philosophy. If truth is to be found in the whole, then if any part of a given social formation appeared unreasonable the same must be said for the whole. Marx locates this unreasonableness in the existence of the proletariat. The proletariat is barred from exercising true reason and freedom by virtue of its place within the social order. This represents an internal contradiction within the totality and thus points to the idea of possibility and movement. As Marcuse puts it, if the laborer is in fact separated from his own essence,¹³ "the reality of reason, right, and freedom then turns into the reality of falsehood, injustice and bondage" (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 261).

Marcuse argues that Marx begins with this point, founded as it is in Hegelian categories, and constructs his social theory from there. Besides Hegel, Marx also drew on Feuerbach, whose own form of materialism was an outgrowth of the so-called Left Hegelian movement. Feuerbach, however, ultimately neglected the dialectical method in favor of a more static form of materialism that took sense-certainty as the ultimate criterion of truth (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 271) (a position explicitly rejected by Hegel in the *Phenomenology*). In this way, Marx can be seen as moving beyond both Hegel and Feuerbach by attempting to critically apply the Hegelian dialectic to the labor process. Like Hegel, whose historicist position required its own overcoming, Marcuse argues that Marx's materialist approach is historical in nature and that the "truth of the materialist thesis is thus to be fulfilled in its negation" (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 273).

What is the materialist thesis and what does it mean for it to be fulfilled in its negation? Marcuse argues that it is based on a twofold proposition. First comes the historical fact of the prevailing social order in which the capitalist mode of production governs all human relations. Second comes the notion that this mode of being is an alienated one because the relationship between consciousness and social existence is false (Marcuse [1941] 1999, 273). The falsehood of this relationship lies in the unfreedom of the proletariat as discussed above. The only possibility for this relationship to become a true and unalienated one lies in overcoming the existing social order, governed as it is by the alienated social relations of the capitalist economy. In this sense, Marx's materialism is grounded in the historical fact of capitalism and will in effect be overcome once capitalism itself is overcome. This means that, as a historicist theory, it is also itself part of history. For Marcuse, Marxist

thought is not a universal, mechanistic view of the relationship between modes of production and relations of production; it is instead an immanent critique of the capitalist social order. In this way, Marcuse pushes the Critical Marxist tradition both back toward its Hegelian roots and forward, away from the dogmatic, closed ontology of official Marxism.

The Hegelian Influence on Marx: The 1844 Manuscripts and the Grundrisse

Marx's early writings were key for Marcuse's understanding of the relationship between Marxism and Hegelianism. It is important to remember that the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* were not published, even in Russia, until 1927 (and a German edition was not published until 1932), meaning that Marcuse was one of the first writers to deal explicitly with these texts. Furthermore, during their correspondence in the years between 1954 and 1979, Marcuse and Dunayevskaya engaged in a discussion of the importance of the Hegelian dialectic in the formation of Marx's argument in *Capital* (as evidenced by Marx's own remarks regarding Hegelian philosophy as he was writing the *Grundrisse* [1858]) (K. Anderson 1990). The *Grundrisse* was not published until 1939, and it served as a major influence in Dunayevskaya's interpretation of *Capital* in *Marxism and Freedom*.¹⁴ It is the publication of these works that provided the crucial link between the early Critical Marxism of Lukács and the Marxist Humanism of Dunayevskaya.

However, even with the publication of these previously ignored writings, some Marxist theorists insisted that the Hegelian influence on Marx is either minimal or non-existent. These claims have largely come from Scientific Marxists wishing to maintain Marxism as a science free of subjectivism, a position that sometimes approaches positivism. Since the 1960s, Louis Althusser has become the most important proponent of this view, as seen in his *For Marx* ([1965] 1969). In the essays contained in this book, Althusser argues against reading the philosophical leanings of Marx's early writings into his more economically oriented, mature writings. While this may be a valid point to make if there were a clear distinction between his early and later writings, the conversations between Marcuse and Dunayevskaya regarding the Hegelian influence visible in the *Grundrisse*—and many other sources—have severely undermined, if not refuted, the notion that Marx abandoned the orientation that is explicitly present in his early writings.¹⁵

Furthermore, as was touched on earlier, Althusser makes the claim that socialism is a scientific concept while humanism remains in the realm of ideology for Marx (Althusser 1969, 223). Marcuse argues exactly the

opposite when he states, in the preface to Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*, that Marx "accepts 'humanism' not as a philosophy among others but as a historical fact or rather historical possibility" (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, xxii). This ought to remind the reader of Marcuse's discussion of possibility, actualization, and essence in *Reason and Revolution*. Throughout this discussion, Marcuse elides the distinction between ideology or philosophy and science in Marx's thought. In this way, one can see the impact of the Hegelian dialectic on Marx's thought. Not only is Marx's humanism clearly reminiscent of Hegel's search for human emancipation and the journey out of alienation in the *Phenomenology*, but his very method of conceiving of this humanism depends upon a notion of possibility and reality that is explicitly Hegelian. This alone is not reason enough to dismiss the Althusserian idea of an epistemological break in Marx's thought; however, what follows is an attempt to show that this Hegelian foundation remains present not only in the posthumously published *Grundrisse* but also in *Capital* and was crucial in the formation of Raya Dunayevskaya and C. L. R. James's own thought.

American Trotskyism and the Return to Hegel

While Critical Marxism was experiencing rapid growth and development amongst European Marxists in the 1920s and '30s, American Marxists had yet to develop a Critical tradition of their own. While America was home to a variety of socialist and leftist movements, from early on American Marxist thought tended toward Scientific Marxism. The Communist Party served as the largest Marxist organization in the United States for several decades and had enlisted 60,000 members from various leftist currents within months of its founding. Dissident Marxists who later found themselves critical of official Soviet policy under Stalin found little room within the official party channels, and many abandoned the CPUSA in favor of a variety of forms of Trotskyism. While the Trotskyist parties offered more flexibility, they still remained entrenched within the Scientific paradigm insofar as Marxist philosophy was concerned.¹⁶

This is not to say that American Trotskyists were not exposed to Critical Marxism. The famous pragmatist Marxist philosopher Sidney Hook began his intellectual career supporting CPUSA candidates and attended lectures by Karl Korsch in the late 1920s while on a Guggenheim Fellowship in Germany (Wald 1987, 52).¹⁷ However, Hook's interpretation of Marxism, made most explicit in *Towards the Understanding of Karl Marx* (1933), pushed him closer to Scientific Marxism. Ultimately he moved away from both the Critical and Scientific elements of Marx's thought by placing the

emphasis on Marx's activist side and incorporating Dewey's pragmatism into Marxist socialism (Wald 1987, 127).

It is in this environment that C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya found themselves during their formation as Marxist intellectuals. After splitting with Trotsky himself over the 1939 Nazi–Soviet Pact and the characterization of the Soviet Union as a degenerated workers' state, they separated from the James Cannon's Socialist Workers Party to join for seven years the Shachtman wing of American Trotskyism. James and Dunayevskaya (joined a bit later by Grace Lee Boggs) found themselves in a minority tendency back within the Socialist Workers Party in 1947 and by 1951 had left Trotskyism altogether in order to form Correspondence. This history of schism and return and schism once more suggests that James and Dunayevskaya (as well as Boggs) were up to something unique in American Marxism at the time. While the initial disputes with the existing parties had to do with the class nature of the Soviet Union (as discussed in the previous chapter), there were deeper philosophical conclusions to be drawn from these disputes. James and Dunayevskaya soon realized that their observations of the Soviet Union required a complete rethinking of the Marxist tradition. In the aftermath of World War II, they did just this, with Lenin in 1914 as their model. Immersing themselves in the philosophical writings of Marx, Lenin, and Hegel, both thinkers began the project of rethinking Marxism for the mid-20th century.

C.L.R. James's *Notes on Dialectics* (1948)

In 1948, C.L.R. James completed his primary work on Hegelian dialectics, *Notes on Dialectics*, a work that, according to Cedric Robinson, “was a too rare example of a living, active, grappling Marxism” (Robinson [1983] 2000, 285). Robinson notes that American Trotskyism forced James and Dunayevskaya to either abandon Marxism altogether or engage in a critical reevaluation of the entire tradition. Taking up the Critical tradition established by Lukács and Marcuse, James attempted to investigate the dialectical method inherited by Marx. Where James differs from his predecessors is that he constantly refers back to the workers' movement as he moves through Hegel's categories as set out in the *Science of Logic* (1812–1816). This is reflective of the nature of this work as an internal document meant for fellow party activists and serves to set it apart from academic treatments of Hegel or Marx's thought.

James begins the work by identifying three modes of thought discussed by Hegel in the preface of the *Logic*: vulgar empiricism/perception, understanding/intelligent reflection, and Reason/dialectical thought. In this

section, James notes that empiricism simply sees a collection of particular facts, while understanding is able to organize these facts systematically. It takes dialectical thought to recognize that the finite categories that understanding establishes are in fact constantly moving. Recognizing that all three of these forms of thought are interconnected and equally necessary, James turns to the example of the labor movement to explain why this is so. He notes that a “genuine empiricist sees the CIO as something that happened. It came, that’s all” (James [1966] 1971, 11).¹⁸ Meanwhile, understanding shows us that thinking “in terms of First International, Second International, Third International, in embryo” is necessary if one wants to fit this fact into a coherent whole (Ibid.). James then states that this form of thinking, understanding, is in fact dialectical to an extent. It is not merely taking the world as it is and attaching labels to it; rather, it negates them. It negates their immediate facticity in order to synthesize and move forward. However, “precisely because it does not at once begin negating the determinations that it has made it leads its user into trouble. . . . It creates universals, a great stage in thought, but the universals it creates assume permanence. They therefore remain abstract” (Ibid.). This ought to remind the reader of the previous Marxist interpretations of Hegel that have been discussed. Abstract universals are an important and necessary component of dialectical thought, but they must be overcome in order to arrive at the point of actualization.

What are the ramifications of remaining in the realm of abstract universals? James turns to Trotsky’s defense of the Soviet bureaucracy in order to show the real consequences of remaining in understanding. As was noted in the previous chapter, supporters of the emerging Soviet bureaucracy argued that state-property was equivalent to socialism. They did this without realizing that the particular experience of statification in the Soviet Union was merely a universalization or generalization of property rather than an overcoming of the concept of property. James points out that Trotsky, holding on to the category of state property, failed to recognize that this category no longer described what it meant for socialism to exist in his own time and place (James [1966] 1971, 34).¹⁹ Thus, just as Lukács before him, James argues that it is in fact the dialectical method that must be retained rather than any particular observations or propositions advanced by Marx, Engels, Lenin, or anyone else.

In order to move toward dialectical thinking, although he does describe it in minimal detail early on, James introduces a new group of categories. It consists of identity, difference, and contradiction. While these concepts were equally important for Marcuse, James brings them back to an understanding of the labor movement in order to move toward an understanding of

Hegel's absolutes for his own time. Furthermore, he relates them back to the various forms of cognition discussed above.

In identity, James finds the crude empiricist's view of the world. This is this. That is that. However, like all Hegelian categories, identity cannot simply be this. Identity contains within itself the idea of difference. This is not that and that is not this; furthermore, the present this is not identical to the future this. James, using the example of a house, explains it as follows: "In two years that house will be another house: paint gone, holes in the roof, furniture water-logged, grass growing in the patio" (James [1966] 1971, 84). He notes that these changes occur over time and existence is always caught up in a struggle with non-existence. Because of this, "this house is, but at the same time it *is not*, or to be more precise, it is and it is not what it is, it is also something else" (James [1966] 1971, 84). One can see then how identity itself contains within it the movement to difference.

But difference must also carry identity within itself. James contrasts the concept of difference to the concept of unlikeness when he notes, "I do not compare a camel to a French dictionary. Those are merely things which are unlike; there is no 'difference' between them. Sure they are 'different', but that is a vulgar difference, as vulgar in its way as the identity that house is house" (James [1966] 1971, 84). Thus, real, substantive and meaningful difference requires some degree of identity.

It is at this point that the real movement begins for James. He notes that Hegel is concerned much less with simple difference than he is with what he calls "the specific difference" that represents "the Other of the object" (James [1966] 1971, 85). He calls this the difference that belongs to the object and distinguishes it from all other objects. Just as much as identity defines an object, so does this specific difference. James notes that the term 'father' is really meaningless unless it is considered with its specific difference of son (perhaps child would be a better term here). If one is not talking about the father-child relationship, then there would be no need to use the term here. The same can be said for any concept according to James, and he goes on to provide other examples. Knowing this, one can better understand all sorts of social phenomena; most importantly, for James, one can understand the history of the labor movement and the transitions that it has undergone. James argues that Leninism must be understood as the Other of Menshevism, just as Stalinism represents the Other of Leninism. He goes on:

If you do not see it as Difference in Identity, cruel, murderous, but (given the objective forces) necessary *transition*, then you rush off into fantastic explanations such as 'tools of the Kremlin' or the incapacity of the workers to understand politics and such like. . . . That which ultimately

becomes obstacle over which you must climb is an Other which was inside it, identical with it and yet essential difference. If the 4th International is to supersede Stalinism then it must “contain” Stalinism in its concept of itself.

(James [1966] 1971, 87)

For James, understanding the relationship of the concept to its Other is essential for understanding the concept itself. One cannot possibly conceive of a solution to a problem unless the problem is seen as something contained within the solution that must be overcome. To understand concepts, whether this means “father” or Trotsky’s “4th International,” as isolated, harmonious identities is to not understand them at all.

This is where contradiction becomes so important for Hegel and James. If vulgar empiricism sees only simple, static identities in the world and intelligent reflection understands the relationship between identity and difference yet still views contradiction as something external to identity, then dialectical thought recognizes the role of contradiction as an internal characteristic of identity and understands the dynamic nature of concepts and their Others. James argues that once contradiction is understood as internal to any object or concept, one can gain a clear view of the shortcomings of socialist thought up to this point. Failure to recognize contradiction as characteristic of all concepts leads to the creation of stagnant abstract universals; for James, nobody was guiltier of this crime than Trotsky.

As James sees it, Trotskyism, remaining as it does in the realm of understanding, moves on from Leninism but fails to adapt to the objective reality of contemporary society. Instead, Trotsky took hold of categories developed under Lenin and raised them to the level of abstract, empty universals. James notes that Trotsky (and Stalin) insisted on nationalized property and the plan as the universal of socialism; however, neither Marx nor Lenin ever made this claim. Instead, as Marcuse points out in his discussion of Marx’s departure from Hegel, the true, concrete universal of socialism is the free proletariat (James [1966] 1971, 162).²⁰ The reason for this is because the defining internal contradiction of capitalism is the unfreedom of the proletariat. While capitalism does represent a high point in inequality and the concentration of property, this inequality can only truly be overcome by transcending the very structures that keep it in place. This is not a matter of nationalizing property but of the proletariat determining its own future.²¹ As James saw it, Trotsky could not fully comprehend this because he could not move beyond the (necessary) stage of understanding. He could only think in the categories that were already familiar to him, not in terms of

their interconnectedness and of the movement generated by their own internal contradictions. While Marx made it clear that it was the contradictions that matter, Trotsky instead latched onto the categories established by Marx without recognizing movement. James recognized the necessity of moving beyond Trotskyism if any sort of socialist project was to be saved. In this way, James moved beyond Marcuse and Lukács by following their own projects through toward an analysis of the contemporary socialist movement.

But there is something else to be gleaned from James's particular reading of Hegel. Not only does the application of the Hegelian dialectic to Marxism itself move beyond the dogmatism that was holding the socialist movement back, but it also points toward an understanding of dialectics as a radically open and dynamic form of philosophical understanding. Andrew J. Douglas points this out when he talks about the minor narrative running through *Notes on Dialectics* in his article "Democratizing Dialectics with C. L. R. James" (2008). Douglas suggests that James presents two parallel narratives: one, which has already been discussed, uses Hegelian philosophy to provide a backdrop for an otherwise orthodox Marxism (concerned as it is with grand historical movement); the other, minor narrative presents dialectics as a democratic mode of thinking available to the masses (contrary to the claim that it belongs only to the philosopher) (2008, 422). Douglas's evaluation of the major narrative is hardly sympathetic, he seems to be in awkward agreement with John McClendon (2005) on this point; however, he finds much to admire in the minor narrative. This minor narrative suggests that individuals ought to engage the world in a critical manner, ever aware of the internal contradictions present in all reality. This idea will be touched on more in the final section of this chapter, but it is important to note that James's Hegel might be much more democratic than usually thought to be.^{22,23}

The ramifications of the democratization of the Hegelian dialectic should be fairly clear. James's own use of the labor movement shows that the abuse of dialectical thought by the totalitarian regimes of his time is based on a misreading of Hegel that ignores the creative capacity of the human subject. Furthermore, this emphasis on the creativity that James finds in Hegel allows for a way out of determinist readings of Hegel's system as a closed ontology. If Douglas's reading of James is correct, the question remains as to why James embedded this radically democratic notion of the dialectic within the larger framework that could still be taken as a closed ontological system. Furthermore, why did he end his reading of the *Logic* at the same point as Lenin did (before the full discussion of the doctrine of the Notion, what Hegel termed the subjective logic)? There are no definitive answers to these questions; however, in the writings of Raya Dunayevskaya, one can

find an interpretation of the Hegelian dialectic that attempts to transcend these problems.

Raya Dunayevskaya's "Philosophical Moment" of 1953 and After

Raya Dunayevskaya assisted James by typing *Notes on Dialectics* and translated Lenin's Hegel notebooks for James and Boggs. Dunayevskaya provided him with a good deal of critical feedback in the years immediately following its publication (Dunayevskaya [1972] 1997) (Dunayevskaya 2002, 345–354). She began a full scale, independent investigation of the possibilities presented by a renewed involvement with Hegelian dialectics in the early 1950s—near the end of her collaboration with C.L.R. James and the Johnson–Forest tendency as a group. Where James pushed for a reading of Hegel along Leninist lines, albeit updated for the contemporary American context, Dunayevskaya argued for a move beyond a simple rearticulation of Leninist concepts. Furthermore, James's reading of Hegel ended before the final book on the doctrine of the Notion, nearly a third of the text. In particular, Dunayevskaya held that the final pages of the *Logic* are too important to merely pass over, something that Lenin did as well. Finally, Dunayevskaya argued that the Hegelian method requires pushing Marxism beyond a reliance on working class activism and toward the inclusion of new elements within the idea of radical subjectivity. While James too held this view, Dunayevskaya, taking this further than James, pushes the relationship between Marxist intellectuals and mass movements to new territory. In so doing, Dunayevskaya would a few years later, after her break with James, draw a line from Hegel through Marx and into her own time that connects the dialectic with a conception of humanism that is unique to this particular tradition of thought and practice.

From Lenin to Hegel: Reinterpreting the Intellectual–Activist Relationship

It was her studies of Lenin, particularly while translating his *Philosophical Notebooks* for James during the writing of *Notes on Dialectics*, that led Dunayevskaya to confront Marxism's Hegelian inheritance head on; however, her studies of Hegel pressed her to push beyond Lenin's own reading of the *Logic*. Dunayevskaya notes that, contra Laclau and Mouffe, the crisis of Marxism epitomized by working class fragmentation during World War I required and could be addressed by a return to Marxist theory's revolutionary foundations rather than a move away from Marxist theory. For Dunayevskaya, Lenin's 1914 encounter with Hegelian philosophy, at

precisely this moment of crisis, highlights this fact. While various Marxist leaders throughout Europe were encouraging alignment along virulently nationalist, rather than class-based, lines, Lenin found sustenance in what he soon discovered to be Hegel's revolutionary dialectic.

Dunayevskaya argues that this retreat was not carried out in a spirit of ivory tower isolationism but in order to fully understand the concrete situation faced by revolutionary working class movements in a time of unprecedented crisis. Lenin recognized that what was needed was not simply a matter of rethinking organization; what was needed was a clean break from the Second International, including a reinvestigation of the philosophical roots of Marxism. For Lenin, "what was put into question was the old materialism, lacking the principle of the 'transformation into its opposite,' 'the dialectic proper'" (Dunayevskaya 1973, 96).²⁴ That is, the Marxist leadership of this era had abandoned dialectical thought for a vulgar and static materialism—a materialism caught in the realm of understanding. As was mentioned in the discussion of James's reading of Hegel, understanding proves to be a necessary stage of philosophical understanding but also one that must necessarily be overcome if Marxism is to remain a living and relevant tradition.

In order to carry out this project of revitalizing a stagnant Marxist tradition, Lenin addressed some of what he understood to be the key, relevant areas of dialectical thought. One of the most important of these issues was the relationship between idealism and materialism. While most of his Marxist contemporaries had argued for a materialism that stood distinct from idealism, Lenin now held that this move is what prevented them from understanding Marx's own materialism—a materialism firmly rooted in the dialectic. He viewed earlier Marxists (including himself in his previous writings) as overtly reliant on Feuerbach's (non-dialectical) conception of materialism rather than Marx's own materialism which integrated aspects of both Hegel and, to a much lesser extent, Feuerbach's thought (Lenin [1914–1916] 1961, 179). Dunayevskaya notes that Lenin was referring not only to Plekhanov (whom he explicitly mentions) but also to himself (Dunayevskaya 1973, 103).

This is important because it points out the fact that the crisis in Marxism was one of both practice and theory; practice, because of the immediate effects of working class fragmentation; theory, because the crisis itself was rooted in a profound misunderstanding of Marx's own conceptualization of materialism as rooted in the Hegelian dialectic. This points toward the possibility that the crisis was not one inherent in Hegelian philosophy but was instead experienced because Hegelian philosophy was not being grappled with by the Marxists of the time, thus alienating them from the core of

Marxist thought, the dialectic. Dunayevskaya finds Lenin's encounter with Hegel to be essential in reconstructing Marx's own interpretation and critical use of Hegel's dialectic.

In coming to an understanding of the proper relationship between (Marx's) materialism and (Hegel's) idealism, Lenin exclaimed that "cognition not only reflects the world, but creates it" (Lenin [1914–1916] 1961, 212). This signals Lenin's rejection of previous Marxists' deterministic conceptions of materialism (including his own mechanistic view expounded in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* [1908]). It is a recognition of the dialectical unity of materialism and idealism. Where other Marxists of the time rejected Hegel as abstract and idealist, Lenin recognized "that although Hegel dealt only with thought-entities, the movement of 'pure thought' does not just 'reflect' reality. Dunayevskaya later developed, here going beyond Lenin, the notion the dialectic of both materialism and idealism is a process and that Hegel's Absolute is imbued with 'absolute negativity'" (Dunayevskaya 1973, 104). This move, from an understanding of the dialectical relationship of materialism and idealism to the concept of negativity, is very important for Dunayevskaya.

It is in absolute negativity that Dunayevskaya found the "lifeblood" of Hegel's dialectical system (Dunayevskaya 1973, 13).²⁵ Absolute negativity is the self-movement of the dialectic; furthermore, it is a constant movement from the abstract to the concrete (Ibid.), from alienation to self-realization (Ibid., 15). It is constant because every resolution of every contradiction results in new contradictions internal to itself. It is *self*-movement because of the internal nature of this opposition. This is true throughout Hegel's system, even in the final chapter of the *Logic* where the absolute Idea as the unity of the theoretical and practical Idea is introduced (Hegel [1816] 1969, 825).

This second negation is the positive within the negative. It is neither nullity nor is it a double negative in the sense of simply returning back to the status quo (Dunayevskaya 1973, 13). Marx made this clear when discussing the second negation of private property on the part of a working class revolution that he anticipated eagerly: "It does not reestablish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era" (Marx [1867] 1978, 438). This idea was mentioned in the previous chapter's critique of the state capitalism, but its philosophical importance cannot be overstated. Not only does absolute negativity require pushing through and building upon preexisting concepts; it requires that this be done concretely. This is why Marx explicitly connects the idea to the abolition of capitalist private property; further, it is why Dunayevskaya claims that "the negation of the negation will not be a

generality, not even the generality of a new society for the old, but the specific of self-liberation, which is the humanism of the human *being*, as well as his philosophy” (Dunayevskaya [1961] 2002, 73).

The concreteness of absolute negativity appears to be one of the main factors setting Dunayevskaya apart from other Marxists of the time (whether they be Soviet officials or critical academics). In a 1960 letter to Herbert Marcuse, she echoes Lenin’s insistence that “the absolute is equal to the more concrete” and adds that this is concrete subjectivity; for Soviet Marxists “the self-developing ‘subject’—the proletariat—not just negation of negation ‘in general’ is *the* enemy” (Anderson and Rockwell 2012, 69–70). She goes on to state the following:

[Lenin] saw Hegel laying the premises for historical materialism—the transformation of the subjectivity of purpose by means of working upon, negating object; opposition of subjective end to external object was only first negation, while second negation takes place *through the means*. In this relation between first and second negation, indeed, resides the relation between vulgar and dialectical materialism, for the vulgar materialist never gets beyond opposition of subjective end to external object.

(Anderson and Rockwell 2012, 71)

It is precisely here that Dunayevskaya gets to the real point of absolute negativity. It is found in the action of the self-developing subject. It cannot be an abstract universal category. Furthermore, this second negation is the dialectical link between subject and object that allows for the Marxist understanding of revolutionary subjectivity. For Dunayevskaya, absolute negativity, in a concrete and subjective sense, is what is missing from other interpretations of Marx and from other revolutionary projects.

Dunayevskaya notes that absolute negativity, as self-movement, requires the Absolute Idea to not be the final stop on Hegel’s dialectical trajectory; instead, it serves as a new beginning—its internal contradictions compelling it toward its own transcendence (Dunayevskaya 2002, 177). It appears then that any attempt to label Hegel’s system as a closed ontology must disregard Hegel’s own claims of the Absolute Idea containing the highest contradiction (and what this means, given his own discussions of contradiction and negativity). As Dunayevskaya puts it, the totality that is the Absolute Idea is not “mere content,” not a “new form of cognition,” but is in fact “universal form, *the Method*, i.e., the dialectic” (Dunayevskaya 2002, 178–179). In this way, Absolute Idea is not to be understood as the resolution of Hegel’s system or the end of philosophy; rather, “when subjected to the dialectic method from which, according to Hegel, no truth can escape, the conclusion

turns out to be a new beginning” (Dunayevskaya 2002, 184). All of this is to say that, when the dialectic, and with it the concept of absolute negativity, is grounded directly in Hegel’s own thought (as it must be), it becomes clear that, far from being a closed ontology, Hegel presents the reader with a radically open and dynamic system.²⁶

The Birth of Marxist–Humanism

Dunayevskaya took the lessons learned from her studies of Lenin and Hegel and applied them to her studies of Marx—eventually formulating a new perspective based on this. She called this new philosophy Marxist–Humanism. By recovering Marxism’s Hegelian heritage (in a manner somewhat different from Lukács, Marcuse, and even James), Dunayevskaya believed that Marxism itself, and the socialist movement that claimed it, could be renewed and revitalized. She best summarized her view of the relationship of Marx to Hegel when she stated that

The Marxian dialectic was thus not a mere standing of Hegelian philosophy on its feet instead of its head. It is true that it had been standing on its head and had to be anchored in reality; but Marx saw masses not merely as ‘matter’ but as Reason. It was not they who were “practicing” Marxism. It was Marx who was universalizing their praxis.

(Dunayevskaya 1973, 199)

That is, Marx wasn’t rejecting some sort of Hegelian idealism; he was correcting what he viewed as the flaws of both uncorrected idealism *and* crude materialism while maintaining the importance of dialectical Reason.²⁷

Furthermore, Reason was located not in intellectuals, leaders, or vanguards but in the masses themselves. Dunayevskaya notes that Lenin always looked toward the masses as a potentially “self-developing Subject”²⁸ and that focusing on the concept of leadership is to ignore the key concept driving revolutionary theory and analysis. Using this category as the starting point of revolutionary theory is critical for Dunayevskaya, as

[T]here it is possible to develop, in the *concrete*, the new forces of revolution as Reason. What bars entrance to a dialectical analysis of a revolution by a revolutionary—Trotsky was most certainly a great revolutionary—is, in her view, not the concept of what Leadership is, be it Trotskyist or Maoist, but a concept of self-developing Subject when the *masses* are the Subject.

(Dunayevskaya 1973, 126–127)

By moving away from the organizational issue of leadership and returning to the Hegelian category of the self-developing Subject as Reason, Dunayevskaya points toward not only what a dialectical understanding of revolution means but also why it is so important. Mao also failed to recognize the importance of this category and thus failed to bring about a true revolution that would allow for the dialectical development of what Lenin called masses as Reason.

For Dunayevskaya, Marx's holding to the Hegelian dialectic, with its emphasis on absolute negativity and the self-developing Subject, is crucial to his humanism. Furthermore, Marx's humanism and Hegelianism are both present throughout his writings. As was previously mentioned, Dunayevskaya rejects the Althusserian notion of an epistemological break in Marx's thought. In *Marxism and Freedom*, she argues that Volume I of *Capital* represents something new in Marx's thought not because it is a move away from Hegelianism and toward a science of political economy but because it represents a move to the labor process as object of study. That is, *Capital* represents not a new political economy but an immanent critique of political economy based on the same concepts of alienation and dialectic that were present in Marx's early writings (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 104–105). Indeed, she states that “what characterizes *Capital* from beginning to end is the concern with living human beings” (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 109). This can be seen in the chapter in *Capital*, Vol. I on cooperation, as well as a discussion of the labor process itself carrying the negation of capitalism within it, the notion of commodity fetishism, as a Hegelian concern with the idea of alienation applied to the process of production,²⁹ and in what Dunayevskaya refers to as the dual movements of *Capital*: the historical and the logical.

These two movements are crucial for Dunayevskaya's understanding of *Capital* as a dialectical, that is, Hegelian, work. While the historical movement, as a discussion of the historical development of capitalism, is obvious to any student of history, the logical movement is the core of Marxism. It is in this logical movement that the contradictions of capitalism are laid bare and the absolute contradiction between the necessities of industrial capitalism and its social form becomes clear.

While this claim is accepted by even those Marxists who wish to adhere to a strict delineation between the young, Hegelian Marx and the old, scientific Marx, it is Dunayevskaya's next point that seeks to blur this boundary, if not erase it altogether. It is not merely the case that Marx argues in *Capital* that capitalism contains internal contradictions; rather, these contradictions compel a movement away from alienation and toward the “fully developed individual” (Marx [1867] 1915, 534). For Dunayevskaya, this is further

evidence that Marx's humanism was not something that he left behind upon discovering a scientific materialism; instead, it flowed through his early writings, into the *Grundrisse*, and eventually found its way into *Capital*. It is this humanist impulse, not timeless laws of economics, that provides the possibility of the absolute negation of Capitalism (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 119).

Dunayevskaya's Marxist-Humanism differs from James's reading of the dialectic in that it remains grounded in the concept of absolute negativity and the idea of a movement from practice to theory as well as from theory to Marxist-Humanist philosophy.³⁰ These dual movements drive home the idea of masses as reason in a way that even James's democratic reading of the dialectic does not. Conceptualizing Marxism in such a way connects theory and practice in a dialectical relationship, as described by Hegel in his account of the Absolute Idea (Hegel [1816] 1969, 824). What this means is that, echoing Lenin, actual lived experience both shapes and is shaped by thought; James's understanding, while it does privilege masses over elites, still relies on an implicit separation between thinking and doing, between mental and physical labor. As Peter Hudis points out in his essay on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution (2007), James privileges mass activity over intellectual work when he argues, in *Facing Reality* (1958, 117), that "the day-to-day struggles of the workers constitute the socialist society" and that "we [merely] have to record the facts of its existence" (James [1958] 1968, 110).

For Dunayevskaya, this move throws cognition, along with philosophy, back into a pre-dialectical relationship with action. Radical subjectivity is no longer co-constitutive of philosophy, and thought itself becomes reduced to mere reflection.³¹ While one can see the anti-vanguardist impulse that pushed James toward this position, it ultimately leads to the superfluosity of Marxist theory. James himself argues that philosophy as such comes to an end with the emergence of mass activity (James [1958] 1968, 69). Dunayevskaya, instead, constantly refers back to Hegel's words in the final chapter of the *Logic* where he states: "The absolute Idea has shown itself to be the identity of the theoretical and the practical Idea. Each of these by itself is still one-sided, possessing the Idea itself only as a sought-for beyond and an unattained goal; each, therefore, is a *synthesis of endeavour*, and has, but equally has *not*, the Idea in it" (Hegel [1816] 1969, 824). This unity cannot be mere conflation of the two; rather, it signals the importance of both the theoretical and the practical in coming to full human understanding (and thus full human emancipation). This points to the continuing importance of philosophy for both Hegel, who recognizes that the absolute Idea is at its core still contradiction and therefore movement, as well as Dunayevskaya,

who argues that the question of what happens after the revolution is never solely one of practice but also one of theory (Dunayevskaya [1961] 2002, 73).

In this way, her work points toward the culmination of this movement in the self-knowing revolutionary subject. This is what un-alienated existence looks like for Dunayevskaya, and this is what Marx's own humanism means for her. In her essay "Marx's Humanism Today," included in Erich Fromm's *Socialist Humanism* (1965), Dunayevskaya lays out the concreteness of Marx's humanism. She finds it in his claim that in revolting against alienated labor, the proletariat moves from being merely acted upon by capital and becomes subject. She also finds glimpses of it in the 1956 Hungarian revolution, the "100 flowers" campaign by dissident intellectuals under Mao, and in third-world liberation movements. Each of these moments point toward masses acting as reason. Philosophically, Marx's humanism represents the dialectical transcendence or *aufheben* of both idealism and materialism as well as of mental and physical labor (Dunayevskaya 1965).

This requires not only that the working class begins a movement toward radical subjectivity but also that philosophy moves in that same direction. This means moving away from abstract universals and focusing on concrete relations between living, breathing, and acting subjects (Dunayevskaya [1958] 2000, 61). For Dunayevskaya, this also suggests a new form of cognition arising alongside new forms of action. To ignore this fact is to fall back into Lenin's crudely materialist 1908 view of cognition merely as reflection of matter. To heed this fact is to engage theory and practice dialectically. It is no wonder that Dunayevskaya held so tightly to both absolute negativity and Marx's own humanism, as they seem to require each other. By focusing on these two aspects, Dunayevskaya shows that both vanguardism and spontaneism make abstract universals of forms of organization. Both positions eventually tend toward alienation. What is needed instead is the radically open understanding of Hegel's own system, which allows for the free self-moving subject to be realized. It is here that theory and practice are united without one limiting the other. This, Dunayevskaya maintains, was what Hegel meant in the final pages of the *Logic* and what Marx strove for throughout his writing.

A Groundwork for Rethinking Revolutionary Subjectivity

All of this is to say that Laclau and Mouffe's post-Marxism can be questioned on two, perhaps contradictory, fronts. First, in their reliance upon the scientific brand of Marxism advocated by Louis Althusser, they underestimate the importance of Marx's Hegelianism and humanism. Second,

in their rejection of Hegelianism as a closed ontology, they overestimate the deterministic nature of Marxian dialectical thought. At first glance, it might seem difficult to simultaneously hold both of these positions; however, one of the purposes of this chapter is to show how these two tendencies actually reinforce each other. Ultimately, they reject Marxism because of its Hegelianism; that is to say, while scientific Marxism attempted to make a clean break between the early and late Marx, it could never be fully successful in making this break and thus always fell back on the necessarily totalizing aspects of Hegelian thought. What this chapter has argued is that it is precisely Marx's Hegelian inheritance, and Marx's own insistence on understanding communism as humanism, that provides the Marxist tradition with a rich, dynamic, and ever open framework. Further, it has been argued that it is in C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya's writings that one finds the most fully fleshed-out reading of Marx and Hegel that allows for this type of understanding. Throughout their writings, both James and Dunayevskaya held fast to dialectical thought. Dunayevskaya pressed this the furthest in her emphasis on absolute negativity and Marx's humanism; however, James's own reading of the *Logic* is also critical for understanding the truly democratic and process-driven nature of the Hegelian dialectic.

This humanist understanding of the Hegelian and Marxist traditions then is one that is fully compatible with the realities of contemporary capitalism. It is a tradition that rejects abstract universals; absolute certainties; and rationalist, technological determinism. It is a tradition that embraces possibility, contingency, and human agency. Not only does this avoid the problems that many discussions of the failure of Marxism might point toward, but it also opens up the potential for Marxism to avoid the pitfall of class essentialism as understood by Laclau and Mouffe. The next chapter explores this potential in detail.

Notes

- 1 For Althusser, overdetermination means that "the 'contradiction' is inseparable from the total structure of the social body in which it is found, inseparable from its formal *conditions* of existence, and even from the *instances* it governs; it is radically *affected by them*, determining, but also determined in one and the same movement, and determined by the various *levels* and *instances* of the social formation it animates" (Althusser 1969, 101). Furthermore, this understanding relies on Marxist categories but is impossible under Hegelian categories for Althusser. Indeed, what might appear to be instances of overdetermination in Hegel are actually instances of a "cumulative *internalization*" (Ibid.). An understanding of this is not crucial for the argument at hand but does assist in explaining exactly what Laclau and Mouffe are rejecting.

- 2 It is of some interest that Laclau and Mouffe consistently point to Althusser as the Marxist theorist that takes the paradigm to its highest points. It is of no small importance that Althusser is also one of the Marxist theorists who most consistently fought against reconciling the Marxist tradition with its Hegelian inheritance. Althusser goes as far as to claim that, more than simply being an inversion of the material and the ideal, the structures of Marxist dialectical thought must actually be the opposite of Hegel's dialectical structure (Althusser 1969, 93–94). One cannot help but wonder if this is the direction that Laclau and Mouffe should have taken if they wanted to present an accurate image of the Marxist appropriation of Hegelian logic.
- 3 While dividing Marxism in two like this does not necessarily provide the most descriptive detail, these opposing categories do appear to be more useful than the ambiguous term *Western Marxism*. It could be argued that Western Marxism is in fact a useful term, and it definitely can be. However, the changes that have taken place within (and without) Marxism over the years make Merleau-Ponty's Western Marxism of 1955 a very different beast from Martin Jay's Western Marxism of 1984. Thus, for the sake of clarity and utility, the distinction between Critical and Scientific Marxism will be the one employed throughout this chapter.
- 4 It ought to be noted that most, if not all, of these thinkers would likely come under the umbrella of Western Marxism. In this sense, Gouldner's categories might be understood as sub-categories of Western Marxism itself.
- 5 This description applies not only to differences in interpretations of Marx but also of his successors. Remember that Althusser not only denies the mature Marx's Hegelianism in *For Marx* (1965) but also the mature Lenin's Hegelianism in "Lenin Before Hegel" (1969). This topic will be addressed when discussing Dunayevskaya's interpretation of Lenin's 1914 Hegelian turn.
- 6 While Lukács defends the term "orthodox Marxism," it is important to note that his orthodox Marxism is quite different from Karl Kautsky's. Kautskyan orthodoxy, as discussed in the previous chapter, actually falls more in line with Gouldner's conception of Scientific Marxism. Furthermore, Lukács uses this term in order to distinguish truly orthodox Marxism from Bernstein's revisionism as well as Kautsky. Interestingly enough, both Kautsky's orthodoxy and Bernstein's revisionism have much more in common with each other than with Lukács's critical orthodoxy (this position is also discussed in relation to Lenin's position in the previous chapter).
- 7 This will be explained in more detail in the discussion of Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* below.
- 8 As was noted in the introduction, Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* (1966) will not be thoroughly discussed due mainly to its later date of publication. As it was published over twenty years after Marcuse's primary work on dialectics, over a decade after C.L.R. James's *Notes on Dialectics*, and nearly a decade after Raya Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*, it is of little use in establishing the narrative of the development of thought that is being presented here. Furthermore, it should be noted that *Reason and Revolution* was the first of the Hegelian Marxist texts to appear in English and, as Kevin Anderson notes (1993), it was the first systematic treatment of Hegel's major works from a Marxist perspective to appear in any language.
- 9 Marcuse is here referring to dialectical philosophy, not analytic philosophy or formal logic, when he employs the word "philosophy."
- 10 Such a notion is rejected in Hegel's discussion of the master-slave relationship. Neither the master nor the slave can be truly free until their relationship, and their very identities, are transcended.

- 11 It should be noted that Laclau and Mouffe could also be said to be working within the categories of formal logic, even when offering a critique of dialectical thought.
- 12 While Marcuse does spend some time discussing Hegel's later political philosophy, this is of little importance here as he is mostly dismissive. Marcuse rejects *The Philosophy of Right* as authoritarian and not in keeping with the radical perspectives of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. By relying on Hegelian categories, Marcuse attempts an immanent critique, arguing that while Hegel's own politics might have been conservative, while in fact his philosophy required a rejection of the Prussian status quo.
- 13 The term "essence" here refers to the idea of the actualization of possibility representing the essence of a given subject. This should not be taken as a reference to a static conception of human essence or nature.
- 14 This point is repeated in Marcuse's preface to Dunayevskaya's *Marxism and Freedom*:

It has often been emphasized that Marx's philosophical writings which preceded the *Critique of Political Economy* prepared the ground for Marxian economics and politics. After a long period of oblivion or neglect, these philosophical writings became the focus of attention in the 'Twenties, especially after the first publication of the full text of the *German Ideology* and of the *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*. However, the *inner identity* of the philosophical with the economic and political "stage" of Marxian theory was not elucidated (and perhaps could not be adequately elucidated because a most decisive link was still missing, namely, the *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie* of 1857–1858, first published in 1939 and 1941). Dunayevskaya's book goes beyond the previous interpretations. It shows not only that Marxian economics and politics are throughout philosophy, but that the latter is from the beginning economics and politics. (Dunayevskaya 1958, xxi)

- 15 This is not meant to be a full engagement with Althusser's position, nor is it meant to be a rejection of all of Althusser's thought. Instead, it is meant to show some of the logic behind the rejection of the Althusserian position. Furthermore, it is important to recall that Althusser's position on this issue likely had an impact on Laclau and Mouffe's treatment of the Marxist conception of history and dialectics.
- 16 This flexibility did not mean that any and all positions were welcomed in the party; rather, once separated from the CPUSA, other disagreements followed, and by 1939 another split occurred.
- 17 Hook's own political allegiances were complicated and included support of both Louis Althusser's brand of Marxism in the 1970s and of Ronald Reagan as well as a deep criticism of the American New Left.
- 18 Here James is referring to the emergence of the Congress of Industrial Organizations as the preeminent labor federation during the sit-down strikes of the 1930s.
- 19 The ramifications for the argument at hand will be addressed below. Currently, it suffices to say that the category of the proletariat as a revolutionary class might be one of these fixed determinations that needs further understanding in light of the apparent contradictions of a fragmented working class or an increase of wages and a consumer lifestyle.
- 20 Here, James can be seen to be working with concepts similar to those found Judith Butler's reading of Hegel in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality* (2000). Butler does not employ the abstract/concrete distinction in the same way as James, but she does place an emphasis on Hegel's own opposition to formal logic in a way that requires a speculative, or dialectical, understanding of the

concept of universality. For Butler, this takes the form of embedded and intrinsic universalities that require translation and a constant reconsidering of universality itself. For Butler, this understanding of universality in flux is essential to her understanding of hegemonic politics.

- 21 See the previous chapter for a full discussion of the democratic implications of such a claim.
- 22 This is especially important in light of Hegel's own political commitments. One of the main points here is that Hegel's own philosophy might offer a much more democratic conception of political discourse than Hegel personally preferred. For an attempt to construct a non-statist conception of the political outside of the *Philosophy of Right*, see John McCumber's "Hegel's Anarchistic Utopia" (1984).
- 23 Douglas argues elsewhere that this reading of Hegel is precisely why James rejects the structuralist and post-structuralist doubts about the Hegelian influence on Marx. James's Hegels (as well as his Marx) were opposed to structuralist explanations that reduce "living human beings to objects, and not subjects of knowledge" (2013, 106). Thus, Althusser's position requires not simply a completely different reading of the trajectory of Marx's thought as concerns Hegelian philosophy but also a rejection of what for James (as well as Dunayevskaya and Castoriadis) are Marx's obvious political commitments to a radical democratic project.
- 24 The concept of transformation into its opposite was critical for Lenin's organizational critique of the Socialist International as well as the shift from competition to monopoly capitalism, which undergirded his discussion of imperialism.
- 25 Absolute negativity is also referred to as the second negation and the negation of the negation.
- 26 Peter Hudis argues that James loses sight of this movement and openness:

In its rush to APPLY Hegelian categories, James' NOTES ON DIALECTIC made spontaneous FORMS of organization into an absolute. For Lenin the right form of organization was the vanguard party; for James the right form of organization became the decentralized, spontaneous form of organization. Despite James' criticisms of Lenin, they both shared a common assumption—that the FORM of organization exhausts the CONCEPT of organization. (Hudis 2007)

The fact that James seems to be paralleling Lenin at this point is all the more reason to emphasize Dunayevskaya's own interpretation of the dialectic.

- 27 Here she follows Lenin in the recognition of the relationship between cognition and reality as dialectical. The importance of Reason here shows that Marx never rejected the Hegelian system in favor of pure method. For Hegel and Marx alike the two were inseparable.
- 28 Whatever sins Lenin may have committed during and after the revolution, this claim seems to be consistent with his (post-1914) writings and his work within the Party after seizing state power.
- 29 It is important to remember that this critique is always focused on the production process and not the circulation process or market level. As Dunayevskaya saw it, the problem with the fetishism of commodities is not one of consumerism but of alienated labor.
- 30 It should also be mentioned that James never placed a great deal of emphasis on Marx's own humanism. While he was concerned alienation, he avoided turning toward humanism per se.
- 31 This view is further reinforced in a 1949 letter to Grace Lee Boggs wherein James, referring to Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (1908), says "reading the book now I find no inadequacy in it" (Dunayevskaya 2002, xxvii). Lenin himself rejected the notion of cognition as reflection upon his 1914 journey into Hegel's *Logic*.

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4 New Forces of Resistance

Anti-Essentialist Revolutionary Subjectivity in Marxist Theory

Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's critique of Marxism rests on the proposition that Marxism, as a theory of revolutionary change, entered an unresolvable crisis in the early 20th century in the face of working class fragmentation along national lines. Laclau and Mouffe suggest that this crisis was aggravated by the fact that Marxist theory itself is incapable of moving beyond a class essentialist notion of revolutionary subjectivity. This chapter takes this criticism seriously but argues that the crisis is in fact capable of being resolved within the framework of critical Marxism. This is established by first laying out a few of the arguments against Marxism as a theory capable of moving beyond class essentialism. Next, the writings of Raya Dunayevskaya and C.L.R. James, as they relate to issues of race and gender, are discussed. This discussion will focus on the attempt by these authors to reconcile Marxism with the objective conditions of 20th century capitalism—that is, with the fact of fragmentation. Finally, these two thinkers are put into conversation with more recent scholarship on race, gender, and revolution in order to distill what in their thought is useful for theorizing these issues today.

Post-Marxism, Subjectivity, and Class Essentialism

Laclau and Mouffe argue throughout *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* that the inherent shortcomings of Marxist theory became manifest in the early years of the 20th century when the socialist movement was faced with the problem of working class fragmentation. To understand this argument, one must first understand the traditional Marxian notion of the working class as revolutionary subject. Marcuse's reading of Marx's understanding of the working class as the *untrue* element of bourgeois society, as covered in the previous chapter, is useful here. In recognizing the shortcomings of Hegel's claims regarding the state of freedom under capitalism, Marx sought to overcome class society and arrive at a truly rational society.

The traditional understanding is that the working class is the only subject capable of realizing a *true* social order. Laclau and Mouffe begin with this assumption about Marxism and seek to understand how it played out in the labor movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They discover that each of the major Marxist theorists they address (from Luxemburg through Bernstein, Plekhanov, and Lenin) is in some way attempting to grapple with the fact the working class is incapable of taking on this role. This reached a head in World War I when the social democratic parties in much of Europe aligned themselves along national rather than class lines.

This fragmentation left Marxism in a quandary. If the working class is to be *the* revolutionary subject then the lack of a unified revolutionary subject called into question the very possibility of revolution. Various theorists attempted to grapple with this problem resulting in the introduction of the idea of hegemony into the Marxist lexicon. The Russian theorists in particular, due to the peculiar circumstances and needs of the Russian socialist movement, argued for a split between the class nature of the subject carrying out a task and the class nature of that task. This is the essence of hegemony for Laclau and Mouffe. Because Russia had yet to experience a bourgeois revolution and lacked a revolutionary bourgeoisie, it was up to the Russian working class (under the leadership of a socialist vanguard party) to carry out both the democratic and socialist revolution. This led to a twofold method of representation in which the vanguard represented the working class and the working class represented the bourgeoisie. Laclau and Mouffe viewed this as both a positive and a problematic development for Marxism: positive in the sense that it was the first step in detaching the revolutionary subject from the class-based nature of the revolutionary task; problematic in that it maintained that the revolutionary task still had an essential class nature.

Laclau and Mouffe take issue with Marxism's insistence on the class-based nature of revolution and revolutionary subjectivity because, even at what they considered its high point in the work of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser, Marxist hegemony still falls back on the simple notion of class essentialism. This is problematic because it maintains a rigid, essentialist notion of subjectivity and revolutionary tasks. That is, working class subjects are, and will remain, working class subjects; they can carry out bourgeois tasks, but the task and the subject retain their original class nature. By basing conflict and revolution solely on an essentialist and foundationalist notion of class, the Marxist tradition is unable to confront non-class-based issues in any meaningful way; rather, all other conflicts are reduced to class conflicts and treated as mere epiphenomena of the capitalist economic order. For Laclau and Mouffe, this leaves Marxism incapable of responding

to new sites of contradiction and oppression as well as new movements for liberation. Turning once again to the thought of both C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya, this chapter attempts to address this issue with the nuance and care that it deserves.¹

C.L.R. James and the “Negro Question”: Marxist Encounters with Race

C.L.R. James devoted a majority of his work to revolutionary agents other than the working class. While this may seem unusual for a Marxist, especially a Marxist of his time, his own origins in the Caribbean under British colonial rule might serve as some explanation for this emphasis. Raised in Trinidad and Tobago, James received a British colonial education, only to join the anti-colonial Beacon Group. In his early 30s, James moved to London, where he became involved with both the Pan-Africanist and Marxist movements. These experiences in the first few decades of his life dramatically shaped both his subjects of inquiry and his method of analysis.

James’s 1938 *The Black Jacobins* was his first book-length attempt to link Marxist theory with an account of a revolt against a racialized, oppressive order. It retells the story of Toussaint L’Ouverture as the leader of a revolt that parallels the narrative of European class struggle without involving the cast of characters one would expect in this narrative. While this alone makes *The Black Jacobins* an innovative work, it is also possible to draw out some of the underlying currents in the narrative in order to construct a unique Marxist approach to the concept of revolutionary subjectivity that moves beyond the standard notion of the proletariat as the universal class.

In *The Black Jacobins*, James, while primarily providing a history of the Haitian revolt, also struggles with his own Marxist background. Cedric Robinson argues that James’s writing on Toussaint L’Ouverture forced him to confront the contradictions of combining a theory of revolution grounded in the Western experience with revolutionary struggles born out of an altogether different experience. Robinson notes that James’s approach

[W]as a complete departure from the way in which Marx and Engels had conceptualized the transformative and rationalizing significance of the bourgeoisie. It *implied* (and James did not see this) that bourgeois culture and thought and ideology were irrelevant to the development of revolutionary consciousness among Black and other Third World peoples. It broke with the evolutionist chain, in the closed dialectic of, historical materialism.

(Robinson [1983] 2000, 276)

The Marxist tradition had historically insisted on the importance of the bourgeoisie in creating the contradictions that were necessary for the formation of revolutionary consciousness; in writing that “one does not need education or encouragement to cherish the dream of freedom,” James pushed against the dominant paradigm within this tradition (James [1938] 1963, 19).

While Robinson argues that James’s claim is inconsistent with Marxist theory and representative of a distinct Black Revolutionary tradition, I argue that James was actually embracing the Marxist dialectic in its entirety rather than maintaining the dogmatic positions that had come to dominate the Marxist tradition. The implication of such a claim is that Marxism does have a place for a theory of revolution and a notion of revolutionary subjectivity outside of the realm of European class relations. It should be recalled that James always envisioned himself as working within the Marxist tradition; more specifically, he considered himself a Leninist even after rejecting many of the tenets usually associated with Leninism.² Furthermore, James’s position regarding social formation and consciousness raising has similarities to Georg Lukács’s understanding of Marxist orthodoxy as hewing to the dialectical method rather than dogmatic party pronouncements.

That said, Robinson is correct in noting that James’s adherence to Marxist dogma and insistence on clinging to Leninism did not allow him to move as far as he could have in *The Black Jacobins*. For example, James, despite his frequent paeans to the spontaneous organization of the masses, still held to the notion of an intelligentsia that existed separately from these masses (James [1938] 1963, 246). While his position on this issue would change later, it created a tension in James’s thought that could not be resolved at the time. Robinson sees this tension as something that James was attempting to struggle with in a real way at the time of writing the book (Robinson [1983] 2000, 278).

Another issue, cleared up after James’s exploration of Hegelian philosophy in *Notes on Dialectics*, was the claim that the “race question is subsidiary to the class question in politics, and to think of imperialism in terms of race is disastrous” (James [1938] 1963, 283). He goes on to note that neglecting the race factor as “merely incidental” is only slightly less of a crime than mistaking it as fundamental; however, the damage had already been done. This topic will be pressed further below, but for now it ought to be recognized that at the exact moment that James appears to be making a breakthrough and separating himself from the established (European) Marxist tradition, he also falls back on this tradition and veers close to type of primacy of class of which Laclau and Mouffe are rightfully critical.

After the publication of *The Black Jacobins*, James moved to the United States and continued to address race issues in American Scott McLemee’s

anthology, C. L. R. James on the “*Negro Question*,” which collects James’s writings on this issue between the years 1938 and 1950. These writings show how James’s thought on the subject developed after the publication of *The Black Jacobins*. Furthermore, these writings serve as an historical record of American Marxism’s explicit grappling with the issue of race during these years. The book is anchored by three key theoretical essays: “Preliminary Notes on the Negro Question” (1939), “The Historical Development of the Negroes in American Society” (1943), and “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States” (1948). In “Preliminary Notes,” James argues that the Black population represents the most revolutionary segment of the U.S. population and attempts to discern the proper course for the Socialist Workers’ Party to take regarding recruitment and leadership of this population. James specifically rejects the entryist position taken by the Communist Party, although he does seem to admire their early efforts to fight for Black equality at a time of extreme white chauvinism within the labor movement (James [1939] 1996, 13). Instead, he argues for a mass organization driven by the demands of the masses themselves—not directed by external party leadership. The role of the party, for James, ought to be “frank, sincere, and unwavering” support of such an organization. Furthermore, such support ought not to depend upon the organization’s own preference for a socialist platform; instead, the move toward organization and democratic action ought to be enough to earn the support of the party according to James.

James further claims that “black chauvinism” in the “concrete instance” actually represents a progressive force in that it is “the expression of a desire for equality of an oppressed and deeply humiliated people” (James [1939] 1996, 9–11).³ He takes care to distinguish this position from the Garveyite idea of Black separatism. Such a notion, according to James, is in fact retrogressive; furthermore, it is not in line with the thinking of the Black masses and is in fact an expression of an external party’s attempt to impose its own will onto the masses. In this sense, James accuses the advocates of Black “self-determination” of advocating an oxymoron of sorts (James [1939] 1996, 8). This can be viewed as a rejection of both the lingering vanguardism of *Black Jacobins* and of the Leninist conception of hegemonic leadership as described by Laclau and Mouffe.

“The Historical Development of the Negroes in American Society” finds James articulating the emergence of the system of racial domination in the United States as well as its relation to the question of social revolution. James argues that a dual movement arises between 1830 and 1860 that is crucial to any Marxist understanding of the race question as it existed in his America. One aspect of this movement is the increasing integration of the

Black population into the process of wage labor. Concurrently, there is an ever increasing consciousness of Blacks as a population explicitly excluded from democratic life. As James puts it, “the Negro in his century and a half old struggle for democratic rights is increasingly confronted with the subjective consciousness as an oppressed racial minority and the objective consciousness of labor as the great bulwark of democracy in the country at large” (James [1943] 1996, 64–65). This again points toward the position that James was developing in 1939; one that argued for the interrelatedness *and* relative autonomy of the race question from the class question. This interrelatedness is emphasized when James notes that consciousness of racial oppression only increases with integration into the labor force. Further, the American system itself is incapable of offering democratic equality to the Black population; thus, for James, struggles for democratic rights must contain within them struggles against American capitalism (James [1943] 1996, 71).⁴ This claim sheds new light on James’s insistence on the avoidance of the type of entryism advocated by the Communist Party. Entryist tactics not only raise suspicions amongst members of the target group, but they are also unnecessary in a practical sense. Furthermore, this claim pushes against those who argue that racial equality cannot be accomplished under capitalism and will be a given under socialism (rendering the struggle for racial equality useless at best and harmful at worst).

In addressing the actions to be taken by a socialist party in regard to this twofold movement, James rejects the hard line Leninist position that requires any mass movement to be subsumed under the socialist movement and led by the proletarian vanguard. Instead, he turns toward Trotsky who argued that the position of the Black population as the most oppressed and most discriminated against made them the most dynamic part of the working class—and were thus in the position to do the leading. Furthermore, he recognized the national struggle of Black workers as being distinct from, yet just as important as, the class struggle. Party organizing, for Trotsky as well as James, must focus on both aspects while recognizing the dynamic relationship between the two (James [1943] 1996, 71–76).

Finally, James’s 1948 piece, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem,” presents the reader with the culmination of his thought on the subject. He begins this piece by making three claims about the Black movement at the time. First, this movement, given its history, has a “vitality and a validity all of its own.” Second, this independent movement is fully capable of transforming social life despite the fact that it is not associated with the socialist movement. Third, this movement is actually capable of contributing to the revolutionary potential of the working class and in fact is itself a part of the struggle for socialism in America (James [1948] 1996, 139).

While these claims might not seem so bold to 21st century readers, they were novel during James's life. In fact, these claims lead James to argue that the Black movement actually approaches Marxist conclusions without Marxist theory or the leadership of a radical intelligentsia.⁵

This utter independence of the movement represents a shift away from the logic of hegemony that Laclau and Mouffe attribute to Leninism. It breaks from the inherently authoritarian concept of hegemonic representation and from the essentialist notion of necessarily class-based attributes assigned to both tasks and subjects. While James argues that Lenin himself actually held this same position, Lenin's position still required proletarian (i.e., vanguard) leadership of national minorities, despite their crucial role as "ferments of the revolution." James's position opens the possibility of rejecting this necessary linkage and suggests that just as oppression takes place on multiple fronts, the same might be true about liberation.

Such a claim differs from the position of Laclau and Mouffe because it is based upon a holistic, Hegelian conception of the social they reject. This conception of the social allows James to make strong claims about the nature of oppression and the need for revolution, without falling back on class essentialism. Rather than being forced into the corner of relativism and political quietism, James, by adhering to the Hegelian idea of the social and Marx's critique of Hegel's own satisfaction with the status quo, is able to push against unfreedom in all of its guises. James's writings on the Negro question show the practical application of dialectical logic to social reality in its entirety. Rather than falling back on narrowly class-based notions of revolutionary subjectivity, his thoroughgoing Marxism forces him to confront oppression on multiple fronts. Furthermore, this position acknowledges the interconnection of the struggles against oppression. Laclau and Mouffe's position, despite its insistence on the plurality of subject positions and perspectives, demands each of these struggles be considered on its own ground. The dialectical position advocated by James demands that each struggle be considered in relation to the social reality as a whole without ever reducing one to another or falling back on a closed-off notion of social totality as Laclau and Mouffe argue Marxism does.

Raya Dunayevskaya: Women, Youth, and the "Black Dimension"

Raya Dunayevskaya, like James, was concerned with what she referred to (quoting Marx) as "new passions and new forces" for the reconstruction of society. While James found the new revolutionary subject in the Black struggle for democratic rights, Dunayevskaya agrees with him but also looks to

the Women's Liberation Movement of her day.⁶ She contextualizes Women's Liberation by first turning to Rosa Luxemburg, the reluctant feminist of the Second International. Dunayevskaya warns against feminists dismissing Luxemburg on account of her scant discussion of feminism or the woman question in an explicit way; instead, she urges her contemporaries to take Luxemburg's writings and revolutionary practice seriously in order to learn lessons for their time. While Luxemburg's position on the issue of national liberation stands in stark contrast to those Marxists (Lenin, James, and Dunayevskaya included) who sought to mobilize national struggles under capitalism,⁷ her position on gender issues offers more room for conversation between these thinkers.

In one sense, Luxemburg's position on the "woman question" was similar to her position on the national question. That is, she viewed male chauvinism as being rooted in capitalism and therefore unable to be overcome under capitalism. However, this does not mean that she never struggled (both in theory and in practice) against this type of oppression. Even when she did not tackle the issue of male chauvinism directly—for example, when the attacks against her took on an increasingly personal and sexist tone after her break with Kautsky in 1911—she still stood up to the male leadership of the German Social Democracy. To say Luxemburg was not a feminist because she refused to publicly confront male chauvinism inside the party appears to be an act of willful ignorance given her struggles as a woman, both within and against the party (Dunayevskaya 1982, 26–28).

If Luxemburg only tangentially attacked the issues of sexism and male chauvinism, why does Dunayevskaya single her out as *the* example of revolutionary Marxist feminism in the early 20th century? The answer is found when she begins discussion of Women's Liberation in Part Two of *Rosa Luxemburg*:

Instead of inventing some mythical highpoint for the "Woman Question" to reach, let us realize that we are, at one and the same time, confronted with two seemingly opposite facts—that the individuality of each woman liberationist is a microcosm of the whole, and yet that the movement is not a sum of so many individuals but *masses in motion*. This does not mean that original characters have not emerged. Rosa Luxemburg was certainly an original, and not because of her multidimensionality, or even her great revolutionary achievements, though in both instances she made great contributions that remain as ground for our age. No, it is that such an original character as Luxemburg, instead of being simply "one in a million," combines yesterday, today and tomorrow in such a manner that the new age suddenly experiences

a “shock of recognition,” whether that relates to a new lifestyle or the great need for revolution here and now.

(Dunayevskaya 1982, 83)

In this way, Dunayevskaya argues that Luxemburg, like others before and after her, is representative of an epoch in a way that only great individuals can be. In the same way, what Dunayevskaya refers to as “masses in motion” also serve to “uproot the old and create the new” (Dunayevskaya 1982, 84). This dialectical interaction between masses in motion and the great individual highlights the thoroughly revolutionary character of Rosa Luxemburg. It highlights the fact that Luxemburg was consistently revolutionary in her opposition to the capitalist order *and* in her opposition to particular, contemporary instantiations of oppression. What this also means for the Women’s Liberation movement is that Luxemburg points the way for a new direction in both her intellectual labor and practical activity—a new direction that only masses in motion can move toward.

This new direction that Luxemburg points toward is discussed in Dunayevskaya’s chapter entitled “Luxemburg as Feminist; Break with Jogiches.”⁸ Dunayevskaya discussed Luxemburg’s relationship with Clara Zetkin, a German socialist who concentrated on women’s issues, in order to point out that Luxemburg’s feminism may have been more integral to her thought and more nuanced than her position on the national question. Despite that it was not initially the woman question but the struggle against reformism that brought the two together, Luxemburg frequently wrote for *Gleichheit* (Equality), the socialist feminist paper that Zetkin edited, and both were active in the women’s movement at the time. Dunayevskaya includes these details to argue against those Luxemburg scholars who would view Luxemburg’s friendship with Zetkin as a “burden” (Dunayevskaya 1982, 89).⁹ Instead, Dunayevskaya argues, this relationship pushed Luxemburg to engage women’s issues in an explicit and autonomous manner—taking up the topic in her speeches and writing as early as 1902. This claim runs counter to the, at the time, prevailing narrative of Luxemburg as a thinker solely concerned with the concepts of organization, spontaneity, revolution, and reform; instead, Dunayevskaya paints a picture of a woman actively engaged in a much larger number of topics. This type of engagement is one example of the so-called new directions mentioned above, but it drives home the point that a critical engagement along both class and gender lines would be necessary for Marxist thinkers, Luxemburg included, to move revolutionary theory forward.

Dunayevskaya also links the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1970s to both the Abolitionist movement and the Black Civil Rights Movement. Dunayevskaya preferred to emphasize and uncover feminist moments that

arose outside of the explicitly feminist movement, like the women's suffrage movement, of her time. She points to Black women's involvement in the movement for abolition as well as the involvement of white middle-class women in the same movement in order to draw out some of the origins of the Women's Liberation Movement of the mid-20th century.

For Dunayevskaya, Sojourner Truth is representative of something larger than one woman's activity in the movement for abolition. Rather, she embodies the demand for absolute emancipation that could only come from someone who had experienced oppression along multiple lines. Dunayevskaya equates her name with internationalism and freedom—freedom that could not be limited solely to the struggle to emancipate American Blacks from slavery but must be expanded to include all those who were currently unfree (Dunayevskaya [1985] 1996, 45). This drive for absolute freedom signifies a moment of recognition of multiple forms of oppression. This moment occurred for Sojourner Truth in a way that it never did for other leaders in the abolitionist movement. When Frederick Douglass suggested that the struggle at hand not be expanded to include women's suffrage or equality because it was “the Negro's hour,” Truth responded by claiming he was “short-minded” for failing to see the ever expanding notion of freedom the abolitionist movement inspired (Dunayevskaya 1982, 82). Truth sought to build alliances along feminist lines with white women, both within and outside the abolitionist movement.

Dunayevskaya relates these occurrences to shed light on origins of the modern Women's Liberation Movement within the abolitionist movement. By drawing out this fact, she is able to describe the emergence of a recognition of intersecting and overlapping modes of oppression at a time when neither social movements nor intellectuals acknowledged this fact. In doing so, Dunayevskaya makes it clear that any solid historical, Marxist analysis must consider these multiple sites of oppression to draw out all the facts in a given situation. Additionally, this connects to her analysis of Luxemburg and Zetkin as two Marxist theorists who did this in the first half of the 20th century. Dunayevskaya not only offers up a Marxist framework for reconsidering class essentialist explanations of oppression and revolution but also provides a history of a revolutionary tradition that has consistently been ignored by both Marxist and liberal scholars alike.

Dunayevskaya recognizes the Women's Liberation Movement as an independent (yet related) struggle from the socialist movement. She cites Doris Wright when she claims that this movement declared:

Don't tell us about discrimination everywhere else; and don't tell us it comes only from class oppression; look at yourselves.

Don't tell us that "full" freedom can come only the "day after" the revolution; our questions must be faced the *day before*. Furthermore, words are not sufficient; let's see you *practice* it.

None of your "theories" will do. *You will have to learn to hear us.* You will have to understand what you hear.

(Dunayevskaya 1982, 100)

This quote elicits the following. First, Dunayevskaya believes the Women's Liberation Movement is not based on the same oppressions as the class struggle and therefore cannot be subsumed under a movement focused on those oppressions. Second, the independence of the movement means that its struggles must occur alongside the socialist struggle—it cannot wait until afterward. Finally, not only does the movement arise independently of the socialist struggle and the Marxist intelligentsia, it has something to say *to* this intelligentsia.

Dunayevskaya differs from other second-wave feminists by focusing on the idea of overlapping cleavages and forms of oppression nearly a decade before Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw introduced her now common concept of intersectionality.¹⁰ While it is true that Dunayevskaya was only able to do so because these overlapping forms of oppression had already been articulated by women and men active in the Women's Liberation and Civil Rights movement in the 1960s, her account is one of the earlier attempts to provide a scholarly, theoretical understanding of the phenomenon. Today the concept of intersectionality (or any of its other variations) is taken as given in many circles when discussing issues of social justice, but it ought to be pointed out that these discussions are often separated from the critique of capital and the Marxist project itself. Dunayevskaya's version of this discussion binds the two narratives together in a way that strengthens the claims of both—allowing each to remain both relevant and capable of mobilizing a variety of subjects.

In discussing the involvement of Black women in the Black Liberation Movement, she recalls one spokeswoman of the National Black Feminist Organization being asked where her loyalties lay and responding: "Well, it would be nice if we were oppressed as women Monday through Thursday, then oppressed as Blacks the rest of the week. We could combat one of the other on those days—but we have to fight both every day of the week" (Dunayevskaya 1982, 103). This sentiment is echoed again in the Organization's Statement of Principles that announce: "We will encourage the Black community to stop falling into the trap of the white male Left, utilizing women only in terms of domestic or servile needs. We will remind the Black Liberation Movement that there can't be liberation for half a race" (Ibid.).

By recognizing the linkages between the Women's Liberation Movement and what she refers to as the "Black dimension," Dunayevskaya locates three potential sites of oppressions along the lines of class, race, and gender. While each of these modes of oppression are distinct and function in independent ways, they can indeed act together to create amplified forms of oppression and alienation. What Dunayevskaya's analysis adds to this conversation is the ability to discuss these multiple sites of oppression in a systematic way; furthermore, by addressing these various oppressions as they exist within movements that ostensibly seek to end one form of oppression, she is able to engage existing paradigms of libertarian thought and their inherent limitations.

By rejecting notions based solely on class, race, or gender, Dunayevskaya takes the first step in rejecting essentialism of all sorts. In doing so, she also shows Marx's philosophy for what it really is: a theory of total human emancipation. This means that not only is Marxism *capable* of responding to the arguments about its inherent class reductionism, a consistently Marxist approach *ought* to reject class reductionist explanations of human alienation and liberation. This is not even a case of Dunayevskaya applying Marx's method in a way that Marx himself never did; rather, Dunayevskaya quotes heavily from Marx (particularly his *Ethnological Notebooks*) to show Marx himself recognized multiple forms of oppression and alienation that operated relatively autonomously. In doing so, Dunayevskaya strengthens her own argument and weakens the claims of those Marxists (beginning with Engels for Dunayevskaya) who want to make an economic reductionist out of Marx.

Finally, her discussion of Sojourner Truth echoes her analysis of Rosa Luxemburg by pointing toward the relationship between masses in motion and revolutionary theory. By noting Truth's reaction to Frederick Douglass, Dunayevskaya points to a breaking point in both practice and theory: a breaking point in which Sojourner Truth, in her own revolutionary practice, recognizes her twofold oppression and, in turn, labels the refusal to recognize this fact as "short-minded." In doing so, Truth introduces a framework capable of conceptualizing these multiple points of oppression into the lexicon of revolutionary theory. This breaking point serves as an example of how Dunayevskaya's own Marxism has developed in such a way to enable her to work with the idea of multiple subjectivities in a capacity not done within the realm of orthodox Marxism. Dunayevskaya, in discussing Sojourner Truth, Rosa Luxemburg, and the feminist dimension of the Civil Rights Movement, is able to push Marxism out of a class essentialist discourse and into the recognition of multiple points of untruth within the capitalist social totality. While this echoes Marcuse's

interpretation of Marx as viewing the proletariat as the untrue element of social reality, Dunayevskaya expands his understanding of freedom and liberation in order to account for multiple sites of oppression and multiple forms of revolutionary subjectivity.

Libertarian Marxism and the Promise of Revolution

It is evident that the Marxism of C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya is of a different variety than many other theorists, such as Lenin, Kautsky, or even Althusser, on whom Laclau and Mouffe focus their criticisms. The Marxism of James and Dunayevskaya remains firmly grounded in historical analysis through the Hegelian dialectic yet avoids the problem of class essentialism. In this way, James and Dunayevskaya represent an alternative that, to quote Olga Domanski, “avoided the relativizing, demobilizing tendencies of postmodernism but was enabled to reach far beyond earlier versions of the dialectic” (Dunayevskaya [1985] 1996, xii).

James, by pushing against essentialist understandings of both class and race, points to the fact that dialectical thought rejects a concept of revolution based on identity and instead is concerned with positions within social totality that serve to undermine the truth of the social totality itself. Dunayevskaya presses on the relationship of the universal and the particular to drive home James’s point. Further, she expands James’s vision of autonomous revolutionary struggles by highlighting the overlapping forms of oppression experienced by Black, working class women. These contributions resist the temptation to slide into essentialist discourse by being consistently grounded in an historical, dialectical framework. This allows for an analysis of social reality as a constant unfolding of contradictions rather than an abstract universal concept capable of dealing only in static identities and rigid determinism.

Given this, revolution for James and Dunayevskaya can be understood as a movement toward truth in a given social order. This does not mean that all attempts at gaining equal rights, membership, or pay are revolutionary. While there are myriad problems associated with the reform/revolution dichotomy, Dunayevskaya and James hold to the position first laid out by Marx in “Private Property and Communism” (1844) that revolutionary emancipation is not concerned with the generalization of property but with its positive transcendence. In this way, revolution is not concerned with generalizing the goods of a given social order (despite the fact that this is an uncontested improvement) but in abolishing that order.¹¹ What both James and Dunayevskaya saw in the Black and women’s movements of their

time was the radical *potential* for highlighting these elements of untruth in order to transcend racialized, gendered, capitalism.¹²

Situating James and Dunayevskaya for Today's Scholars and Activists

Even if James and Dunayevskaya are capable of responding to Laclau and Mouffe's criticisms of Marxism's failure to incorporate agents other than the working class into a theory of revolution, is their writing relevant today? What might two non-academic, Marxist intellectuals of the last century have to say to academics concerned with race, gender, class, or revolution in the early years of this century?

While some scholars—Michael Omi and Howard Winant, for example—suggest that the Marxist tradition was never fully able to understand race because of its insistence on reducing it to the “national question” (Omi and Winant [1986] 1994, 42–44) it should be clear that James's writings on race represent a step away from this orthodox Marxist position and one of the biggest steps forward for the Marxist tradition in attempting to grapple with race within the paradigm of historical materialism. Admittedly, while James never fully articulates a conception of race capable of competing with the one offered by Omi and Winant, it is not the case that such an articulation is impossible within a Marxist framework.

A more recent attempt to address the issue of race from a historical materialist standpoint is found in Joel Olson's *The Abolition of White Democracy* (2004). In this work, Olson explains that racial formation in the United States is the result of particular material practices that produce what he calls *white democracy*. This claim allows Olson to talk of a “political theory of race” and distinguishes him from those scholars that claim American democratic ideals are either unrealized or at odds with competing white supremacist ideals. Furthermore, Olson's book represents one of the best uses of Marxist methodology in the discussion of race in America. By arguing against the concept of race as pre-political, Olson lays out the development of race as co-constitutive of capitalism in the United States. While his work provides a line of argument similar to Theodore W. Allen (1994) as well as Pem Davidson Buck (2001),¹³ Olson is set apart by his call for explicitly abolitionist politics that carry echoes of both the original American Abolitionist movement as well as of Hegel's concept of *aufheben* (often translated not only as overcoming or negation but also as abolition). What Olson does not explicitly do in his text is connect the notion of abolition democracy to the broader Marxian project of total human emancipation. Dunayevskaya and James's writings on the subject do just

that. Additionally, Olson's account, while markedly materialist, does not adequately emphasize the dialectical relationship between Black subjectivity and the white social order. Dunayevskaya and James, insisting upon the revolutionary character of masses in motion, argue that this relationship can never simply be one of top-down domination; instead, Black subjectivity is always involved in shaping white consciousness and the dominant social vision. Their work on this matter complements and enriches Olson's account of racial formation, fitting together to fill a void that is present in each thinker's writings.

The ultimate value of the writings of Dunayevskaya and James is found in their ability to understand Marxism as something more than a theory of class emancipation as well as their ability to understand Black liberation and the women's movement as more than simple demands for the rights of particular identity groups within a larger social framework. Instead, Dunayevskaya and James point to the element of total revolution that is found in Sojourner Truth's demand that the abolitionist movement engage feminism on its own terms or the demand of Black activists for equal rights alongside their white coworkers. Both of these demands recognize that the existence of multiple sites of oppression requires multiple responses and multiple struggles for liberation that cannot be ranked hierarchically or subsumed one under the other.

This means that an understanding of Marxism as a theory of revolution capable of thinking along multiple lines of oppression and across multiple subject positions is in fact possible. This allows scholars to utilize Marx's dialectical method without falling into the trap of class reductionism. It also allows scholars the flexibility of, for instance, Laclau and Mouffe's notion of multiple subject positions without falling into the quietism, relativism, and uncritical pluralism that can be associated with *some* strands of post-structuralist thought. For those scholars concerned with theorizing revolutionary activity, this is a blessing.

For activists engaged in these struggles, the availability of a theoretical framework capable of understanding emerging social movements on their own terms but within the context of social totality is of great benefit. While Dunayevskaya and James focused on providing a Marxist analysis of struggles for race and gender equality, the flexibility of their particular version of Hegelian Marxism makes it capable of incorporating new struggles, struggles not necessarily tied to conventional notions of an oppressed subject fighting for emancipation, as they emerge. This capability serves to undermine the arguments from post-Marxists and critical race theorists against a theoretical framework often seen as bound up in a 19th-century conception of revolution and revolutionary subjectivity. The

framework that has been discussed throughout this chapter provides a way to understand Marxism as a theory and movement for total emancipation in a sense that these interlocutors themselves fail to recognize.

Notes

- 1 Anyone familiar with Laclau and Mouffe's reading of the Marxist tradition is aware that it is a very selective reading. One could engage with any number of strands of Marxist thought in order to drive home the point that Laclau and Mouffe's thesis depends upon such a reading. Anything from Maoist Third Worldism to the Althusserian critiques of essentialist understandings of Marxian politics (Özselçuk (2006) and Resnick and Wolff (1987) come to mind) might serve this purpose.
- 2 It might be useful here to think of James's Leninism as what Andrew Douglas (2013) the "Spirit of Critique." Michael Marder's (2007) Derridean reading of Leninism as a particular posture toward analysis and action also comes close to James's Hegelian Leninism. Compare this to Žižek (2001), who appears to be overly concerned with returning to a nominally Leninist practice, perhaps at the expense of this dialectical posture.
- 3 One could compare James's conception of progressive chauvinism to Frantz Fanon's "national consciousness, which is not nationalism," in order to understand its relationship to broader revolutionary activity (Fanon [1961] 2004, 179). Like James, Fanon saw this particularly national consciousness as being a requirement for thinking about socialist revolution on a broader scale.
- 4 Such a position varies only slightly from that espoused by Laclau and Mouffe, but the differences are still important. While Laclau and Mouffe argue that the movement toward radical democracy will entail a movement toward socialism, James argues here that the movement toward democracy will necessarily also be a part of the movement toward socialism. The key point of difference here then is that James argues that capitalism is not at all compatible with democracy while Laclau and Mouffe claim that the abolition of capitalism is simply one more step toward democracy (but there is no necessary linkage in the movement toward or away from either). These two positions might in fact have profound impacts tactically as well as theoretically.
- 5 In a way, this is a refined version of James's position in *Black Jacobins*—cleared of any vanguardist baggage.
- 6 It is definitely important to note that Dunayevskaya spent a great amount of time working on issues of race in the United States prior to her interrogation of the women's movement. Her work with Charles Denby on *Indignant Heart* ([1950] 1978), as well as *American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard* (1963) serve as two of the best examples of her coping with this issue. The focus on her feminist writings at this point serves merely to highlight the theoretical position being espoused here—that is, the Marxism of James and Dunayevskaya is more than capable of grappling with non-class-based subjectivities.
- 7 For a more complete discussion of Luxemburg's position on the national question, see Chapter IV of Dunayevskaya's *Rosa Luxemburg, Women's Liberation, and Marx's Philosophy of Revolution* (1981) and Tony Cliff's "Rosa Luxemburg" (1959).
- 8 Here Dunayevskaya is making note of a break with Luxemburg's comrade and romantic partner, Leo Jogiches. While Jogiches and Luxemburg were both members of the left-wing *Spartakusbund* group within the German Social Democratic

Party, Dunayevskaya observed both a theoretical and organizational break happening around feminist issues.

- 9 Dunayevskaya is here referring particularly to Henriette Roland Holst, author of *Rosa Luxemburg: ihr Leben und Wirken* (1937).
- 10 It is true that bell hooks was engaging in a similar project, albeit from a post-modernist perspective, at around the same time as Dunayevskaya. The point here is not to argue which thinker advanced a particular position first; rather, it is merely to note that such conversations were occurring before the mainstream acceptance of any idea of intersectionality, multiple discrimination, etc.
- 11 The critiques of the emphasis on marriage equality in the mainstream LGBT movement come to mind here. Expansion of the institution of marriage or access to military service are quite possibly examples of “generalizing” rather than overthrowing the existing social order. Judith Butler makes a similar case when she argues that the liberal emphasis on marriage equality undermines particular subject positions in the name of universal claims of equality (Butler, Laclau, and Žižek 2000).
- 12 Dunayevskaya and James, in some ways, anticipate the debate that took place in the pages of *Contingency, Hegemony, and Universality* (Butler, Laclau and Žižek 2000). Their reconceptualization of revolution and revolutionary subjectivity is more than compatible with both Butler and Žižek’s positions on the subjects. Laclau’s dismissal of Žižek’s abstract demand for social revolution is accurate; however, by falling back on to the position of a more liberal liberalism established in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, he misses the strength of Butler, Dunayevskaya, and James’s reliance on the Hegelian concept of the concrete universal (which, to use Laclau’s language, is always contaminated with the particular) as a tool for rethinking revolution. It would seem that Dunayevskaya and James have a good deal to contribute to current conversations about the potential of revolutionary politics.
- 13 Pem Buck’s work is doubly important here as she brings in the gendered nature of American capitalism in a way that Olson and Allen do not. Similarly, Silvia Federici (2004) also provides a Marxist account of the constitution of gendered capitalism.

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5 Beyond the Politics of Difference

Foundations of a Critical Marxism for the 21st Century

The three previous chapters have shown that Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's critique of the Marxist tradition falls short in several key areas. Furthermore, in making these points, it was argued that there exists a form of Hegelian Marxism capable of engaging an epoch very different from Marx's own. The purpose of this chapter is to show how this particular strand of Marxism is able to assist in theorizing the problems of the 21st century. This is done by first reviewing the problems associated with orthodox Marxism and the ways in which the type of Marxism espoused by Raya Dunayevskaya, C.L.R. James, and, at times, Cornelius Castoriadis overcomes these problems. Second, it is argued that these thinkers contribute to the Marxist, anarchist, and radical democratic literature in several important ways. Third, the so-called newest social movements are briefly discussed in order to show that this brand of Marxism is capable of moving beyond traditional conceptions of social change. Finally, some concluding thoughts are offered and potential areas of further research are discussed.

The Pitfalls and Promises of Marxist Theory

The premise of this book has been the argument that while post-structuralism has much to offer those interested in thinking about politics, it has, particularly in its post-Marxist variants, offered up an unsatisfying critique of Marxism as a revolutionary project. This critique rests upon three arguments. First, the Marxist tradition is inherently authoritarian and all previous attempts at theorizing hegemony from a Marxist perspective have fallen back on said authoritarianism. Second, the Marxist tradition, resting as it does upon Hegelian thought, is based upon a determinist, teleological, and closed ontology. Finally, Marxism is class-essentialist and is incapable of dealing with other forms of oppression without falling back on a framework of class. The three preceding chapters refuted these arguments while arguing for a renewed investigation of an infrequently discussed branch of the Marxist tradition.

In dealing with the allegedly authoritarian core of Marxism, it was argued that there exist strands of the Marxist tradition (including some writings of both Marx and Lenin) that are profoundly anti-authoritarian *and* remain consistently philosophically Marxist. While Laclau and Mouffe argue that the practical project of hegemony within the Marxist tradition culminates in Leninist vanguardism, these alternative strands of thought suggest that in Marx and, in some aspects, Lenin; in the workers' councils of Hungary; and in the U.S. miners' strike of 1949, a non-hegemonic form of democratic power presents itself in the form of masses as Reason. Taking this into account, and moving away from the logic of hegemony (in both its articulatory and representative modes), Dunayevskaya and James offer an understanding of Marxism that is profoundly anti-authoritarian—more so than Laclau and Mouffe's own hegemonic conception of political action.

In grappling with Marxism's philosophical heritage, it is shown that neither Marx nor Hegel can properly be labeled as either materialist or idealist; rather, Hegel's dialectical system, and Marx's appropriation of it, overcomes the boundaries established by the false dualisms of materialism and idealism. Further, this system is not a deterministic and closed ontology. Instead, exactly the opposite is true: the Hegelian dialectic provided Marx with an open and dynamic system. Additionally, Hegel's emphasis on freedom carried over into Marx's work. This conception of freedom was not a formal, individualized notion but one grounded in the freedom of the dialectic and of the human being qua human being. This idea connects to Marx's humanism, which, as I have argued, runs throughout the course of his work. All of this points to the limits of Laclau and Mouffe's own philosophical framework and the flaws in their critique of the Marxist tradition.

Finally, the result of the profound openness of Hegelian philosophy and the creative, democratic impulse of masses as Reason allows for a Marxism that is not bound in a narrow sense to class-based revolutionary subjectivity. While Laclau and Mouffe argue that the Marxist–Leninist hegemonic project requires an unchanging, class-based concept of revolution, James and Dunayevskaya provide ample evidence of an alternative project based on an ever expanding notion of human freedom growing out of the contradictions of existing society. By looking at women's liberation, Black liberation, and anti-colonial struggles through a Hegelian–Marxist lens, James and Dunayevskaya push Marxism beyond class essentialism *and* beyond the so-called national question. This pushes against Laclau and Mouffe's conception of subject positions as the starting point for what might be traditionally considered identity politics by incorporating both the subjective and objective elements of the unfreedom of modern life. Laclau and Mouffe might appear to avoid the essentializing characteristics of liberal identity

politics, but their project of a more liberal liberalism ultimately falls back on the state as final arbiter and granter of rights. A truly radical democratic approach, as found in Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis, locates power in the actors and their actions.¹ In doing this, the Marxist conception of struggle becomes available to any and all subjects of oppression without becoming *merely* subjective.

Contributions to Radical Theory

It is not simply the case that all of this was argued merely to show that Laclau and Mouffe's critique of Marxism is ill-founded; instead, the argument itself rested upon the premise that the thinkers being used to respond to Laclau and Mouffe ought to also be brought into productive conversation with Marxist, anarchist, and radical democratic theory. While this is not the space for a full-scale conversation with each of these traditions, a few words can be said about the contributions that Dunayevskaya, James, and Castoriadis might be able to make to ongoing conversations about radical political theory.

Empire and Dialectical Thought

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri presented one of the most popular Marx-influenced arguments in recent decades in their 2001 book, *Empire*. Drawing from both the Italian ultra-left *Operaismo* movement and the thought of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Empire* attempts to provide an analysis of the current situation of post-Cold War global capitalism and the possibility of emancipation from said situation. Slavoj Žižek has criticized the work as offering a "pre-Marxist" analysis due to the fact that it remains undialectical in its approach to understanding the movement and eventual demise of global capitalism (Žižek, 2001, 193). Žižek suggests returning to Lenin in order to overcome the problems presented by the radically new situation of global capitalism, although the solution could just as easily be found by returning to the Marx of Dunayevskaya and James (as well as Lenin).² Thus, while Deleuze and Guattari offer useful tools of analysis, as has been shown throughout the dissertation, Marxism is not an exhausted theory; rather, it is fully capable of understanding the new epoch of globalization and creating new categories of analysis in light of this fact. Indeed, a dialectical analysis of *Empire* has the potential of opening up radically democratic channels of resistance that Hardt and Negri might miss by avoiding any discussion of the internal dynamics and contradictions of capital. Furthermore, Dunayevskaya's emphasis on the Hegelian negation

opens up possibilities beyond a politics of resistance or demand by instead arguing for a politics that actively creates new possibilities rather than simply opposes the old forms or turning to the state for a piecemeal solution to systemic problems.³ It is Dunayevskaya and James's particular take on Marxist dialectics that allows for both the conceptual and active abolition of capital rather than mere resistance to it.

Richard Day: Hegemony vs. the Anarchist Tradition

Richard Day's *Gramsci Is Dead* (2005) avoids some of the problems associated with both *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and *Empire* but suffers from some shortcomings of its own. In this text, Day, combining classical anarchism with post-structuralism, offers a critique of what he views as the "hegemony of hegemony" (Day, 2005, 8). In doing so, Day situates himself against both liberalism (a group in which he also places Laclau and Mouffe) and Marxism. He notes:

Despite their many historical and theoretical differences, classical marxism and liberalism share a belief that there can be no "freedom" without the state form (Leviathan or dictatorship of the proletariat), and therefore also share a commitment to political (state-based) rather than social (community-based) modes of social change. The paradoxical belief that state domination is necessary to achieve "freedom" is perhaps *the* defining characteristic of the hegemony of hegemony, in both its Marxist and liberal variants.

(Day, 2005, 14)

Day's alternative to the hegemony of hegemony is a turn to the concept of affinity. Affinity is presented as a rejection of the idea of seeking *power over* in favor of recognizing the *power of* action itself (Day, 2005, 13). This ought to appear very similar to the Hegelian Marxism presented by Dunayevskaya and James. For these two authors, the goal of social struggle is not to be found in the act of seizing state power or garnering concessions from the state; rather, it is in the creative process of struggle itself that power is created and subjects are transformed.⁴

That said, what does Day offer that Dunayevskaya and James do not? What do Dunayevskaya and James offer that Day does not? One answer to the first question is that Day presents the reader with examples of contemporary social movements embracing affinitive practices. These examples are crucial to his argument and serve the same function as James and Dunayevskaya's use of the miners' strike, the Hungarian revolution, women's emancipation,

and the Black liberation movement. Another of Day's contributions is found in his use of classical anarchism as a theoretical resource. Day draws on key figures like Proudhon, Bakunin, and Kropotkin, but he uses Gustav Landauer's (1911) *For Socialism* in order to present an understanding of the state as a relationship that is overcome by the forging of new relationships and new creative ways of relating that pushes the thesis of *Gramsci Is Dead* forward (Day 2005, 124–125). This is an important contribution to contemporary anarchist theory, and the inclusion of a discussion of both *Empire* as well as thinkers like Judith Butler, Donna Haraway, and Deleuze and Guattari places Day's work in the middle of some very important conversations happening both within the academy and within broader activist circles.

However, placing Day in conversation with Dunayevskaya and James also opens up the possibility for productive theoretical work to be done. On one hand, this conversation has the same effect as the one between Dunayevskaya and James and Laclau and Mouffe. That is, Dunayevskaya and James point to a strand of Marxism that does not fall short in the way its critics argue. While this claim was used to argue against *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, it can also be used to strengthen some of the claims of *Gramsci Is Dead*. It can be argued that the Hegelian Marxism advanced by James and Dunayevskaya (despite the differences between the two) represents an anti-hegemonic moment in the Marxist tradition. If this is the case, why not use the dialectical framework established by Hegel in order to strengthen Day's political project? This particular form of libertarian Marxism, with its emphasis on human freedom and creative agency, might offer up a framework and a moral–philosophical basis for grounding a variety of affinity-based struggles. Certainly, an attempt to at least begin such a conversation is not unwarranted.

Theory and Practice of a New New Left

The project at hand has never been solely concerned with appealing to academic political theorists; rather, the hope has consistently been to speak to how it is that we do politics in the 21st century. In particular, the focus has been on how it is that radical social change can occur in a world defined by neo-liberal capitalism, a diversity of modes of oppression and alienation, and a rejection of the grand narratives of revolution that held such sway in the 19th and twentieth centuries. In order to enter into this conversation, Richard Day's *Gramsci is Dead* (2005) is returned to in the context of a rejection of the hegemonic politics of the new social movements of the last half of the 20th century and an embracing of the politics of affinity as seen in the newest social movements of the early parts

of this century. It is argued that the Marxism of James and Dunayevskaya has something to offer to this conversation and the way we think about and do radical politics.

Day treats the newest social movements as categorically distinct from the new social movements of the middle of the 20th century. The new social movements themselves were viewed as distinct from older conceptions of social movements which were based upon the concept of proletarian revolution or trade unionism. These new social movements, emerging in the post-war boom of the 1960s that saw an expansion of the middle class in the United States and Western Europe, focused on social acceptance and expansion of human/civil rights to a variety of marginalized groups. The newest social movements, on the other hand, are creative and prefigurative and focus on direct action. For Day, this means that they are “less concerned with affecting the content of current forms of domination and exploitation than [they are] with creating alternatives to *the forms themselves*” (Day 2005, 19).

While this seems like a clear assault on Laclau and Mouffe’s prescription of a more liberal liberalism, one cannot help but wonder if there really is much new to either category of social movement. D’Anieri, Ernst, and Kier (1990) have argued that there is in fact nothing new about the new social movements. They point to the English Chartists of the 19th century, American utopians like the Oneida community, and German peace activists of the 1950s and beyond in order to show that these types of movements are neither unique to post-industrial societies nor new in any real sense of the word; rather, these movements have existed for just as long as the traditional movements modeled on proletarian revolt and Jacobin revolution. This same argument could be expanded to include Day’s reading of the newest social movements by pointing to the Paris commune, the Russian soviets of 1905 and 1917, the 1956 Hungarian revolution, and the early women’s liberation and Black liberation movements in the United States as examples of creative power and pre-figurative politics in action. To be sure, Day does reach back to the classical anarchist tradition in order to ground his reading of these newest movements; however, his claim of identifying a distinct post-1999 trend in social movements cuts these newest movements off from a rich past that is not bound to any particular ideology or -ism.⁵

That said, it is perhaps worthwhile to examine contemporary social movements through a Hegelian–Marxist lens. In particular, I have in mind those movements collectively referred to as the Arab Spring as well as the Wisconsin uprising and Occupy Wall Street and its various offshoots. While these movements can only be considered a success in very limited terms, they provide a perfect opportunity for contemporary dialectical analysis.

Arab Spring: Democratic Action vs. Authoritarian Rule

According to most narratives, the Arab Spring began in January 2011 when protests began over the death Mohamed Bouazizi, who had set himself on fire in protest of the harassment he had faced at the hands of the Tunisian government. This action sparked a revolution in Tunisia and set in motion a series of events that would see mass protests spreading across North Africa and the Middle East. Five years later, the governments of Egypt, Libya (with a significant amount of military involvement from Western countries), Tunisia, and Yemen have been ousted and replaced—some multiple times. Meanwhile, Syria remains entrenched in civil war amongst various factions amidst an ever increasing number of wartime atrocities.

Hamid Dabashi offers a unique dialectical interpretation of these events in *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism* (2012). Dabashi argues that the Arab Spring represents an overcoming (in a very Hegelian sense) of the category of colonialism. For Dabashi, post-colonialism and colonialism exist simultaneously and dialectically as the former is merely the latter “multiplied by the illusion of emancipation” (Dabashi 2012, xx). In this way, “colonialism and postcoloniality combined to place the Arab and the Muslim (as its supreme and absolute other) outside of the self-universalizing tropes of European metaphysics, where the non-Western (thus branded) was never in the purview of full subjection, of full historical agency” (Dabashi 2012, xxi).⁶ Because of this, the Arab subject is always the non-subject of Western historical progress. In overcoming post-colonialism, the Arab Spring forces Arab subjectivity back into the field of history and beyond the static categories of colonial/postcolonial. In doing so, the Arab Spring also destabilizes the concept of Europe or the West. For Dabashi, this allows for the possibility of understanding this series of revolts and revolutions as an “open-ended dialectic committed to the recovery or discovery of new worlds”; new worlds that reject the binary opposition of “the West and the Rest” (Dabashi 2012, 39, 159). Furthermore, this conceptualization allows for an understanding of both agency and contradiction being located in the Arab world. That is, rather than the Arab world serving as the static other of the West, it can be viewed as a vibrant locus of subjectivity with its own multiplicity of contradictions and potential for movement.

What this means is that the Arab world cannot be conceptualized as a static and coherent entity that serves as a point of contradiction for the West. Instead, Dabashi’s thesis pushes for a dialectical understanding of the contradictions within Arab subjectivity. Examples of secularism, pan-Arabism, and Islamism might serve to highlight these internal contradictions. All of

these particular examples made themselves visible in the uprisings associated with the Arab Spring. Dabashi's argument hinges upon the idea that the colonial/post-colonial discourse covers over these internal contradictions in favor of a narrative that always focuses on the West.

Dabashi's work makes these arguments without explicitly engaging in theory per se, but all of these claims point to the radical openness of the dialectic, embodied in the creative actions of the masses, as described by James and Dunayevskaya. While there is no guarantee of democratic outcomes (and surely there are many signs that point to the opposite), the openness and dynamic nature of the Arab Spring allows for the possibility of historical agency in a way that moves beyond the worn out dichotomies mentioned above. In Egypt, while Islamist factions initially rose to power before being ousted in a military coup, it is important to consider the fact that the act of pushing through these contradictions represents a victory in a very real sense, if only because it signals possibility—perhaps the most crucial component of dialectical movement.⁷ It is in this possibility of new worlds that Dabashi, and the actors of the Arab Spring, find a radically democratic subject acting upon the world as it exists. This was seen in Bouazizi's final act of desperation, in the rebels of Libya and Syria and their firefights against their own governments, and in the community that sprang up in Cairo's Tahrir Square. All of these acts represent the self-activity of the masses, not in order to call for reform but in order to resist. Bouazizi's resistance, while it sparked off an entire movement, was ultimately self-defeating. The civil wars that raged and are still raging in many areas display productive action but ultimately rely upon a paradigm of struggle for state power. It is in Tahrir Square, despite the fact that the outcome of the Egyptian protests was regime change, that one can most clearly see the creative power of masses as Reason. The Egyptian resistance involved the construction of parallel modes of power outside of the state form. It is here that the inspiration for movements halfway around the world can be found.

Wisconsin: American Populism vs. Neo-Liberal Consolidation

Shortly after the occupation of Tahrir Square began in Cairo, Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker introduced legislation that would take away collective bargaining rights from public workers in an attempt to resolve the state's budget crisis. While there were several components to the Budget Repair Bill,⁸ Walker's attempt to remove one of the few powers left to post-Taft-Hartley unions was the most controversial among the public. Immediately after the introduction of the bill, public employees from a range of fields—including those excluded from the bill—descended upon Madison

in protest. Mari Jo Buhle claims that while similar protests were occurring in several other states with recently elected Republican governments, the protests in Wisconsin were unique because they drew upon the state's rich progressive heritage (Buhle 2011, 13). What is important to note here is that while the protests in Madison were ostensibly labor struggles, the core issue was one of self-determination, not contract negotiations per se. That is, while economic issues were important here, the occupation of the capitol was not simply about economics. This can be seen in the show of solidarity from the Egyptians in Tahrir Square who recognized the connection between their own autonomous struggle and what was going on in Wisconsin. This can also be seen in the diversity of the protestors in Madison.

While local organized labor was responsible for a good deal of the early organizing of the Wisconsin protests, participation quickly spread to other sectors of the population. Students, farm workers, and community organizers of various types, along with local union members, can be seen among the speakers to the crowd of over 40,000 in footage of the March 5 rally at the capitol. Furthermore, it was only around this time that national labor organizations became involved and attempted to shape the movement along particular lines with an emphasis on contract negotiations. Local union members, along with other participants in the protests, immediately rejected this idea in favor of the more inclusive turn the protests had taken early on (Barrett 2011, 78–79). This understanding of the events in Madison shows the creative power of local communities against both the state and union bureaucracies. It is not necessarily a radical understanding, and could be read in a traditionally American populist way, but it does lend itself to the Marxist analysis of radical democracy (via Marx, Lenin, James, Dunayevskaya, or Castoriadis).

Occupy Wall Street: The 99% vs. the 1%

If it can be argued that the Arab Spring served as the inspiration for mobilization in Wisconsin, then it can also be argued that both movements fed directly into the Occupy Wall Street movement(s). In July of 2011, Adbusters magazine began promoting an event, to take place on September 17th, through its e-mail listserv. Other groups quickly joined in, and much of the planning for the event was carried out by local New York City activists (Schneider 2011). The movement took on the slogan “We are the 99%” in August of 2011 through the efforts of a website of the same name (wearethe99percent.tumblr.com). People from around the country, and eventually the world, began posting their own stories on the site and created a sense of solidarity and awareness of economic inequality. What became evident early

on is that while the target of the early movement was the financial sector, from the initial days of the Zuccotti Park encampment on, it became about so much more than just economic inequality or banking reform.

Noam Chomsky summarized this observation when responding to a question about the lack of concrete demands from the protestors:

But I think, if you investigate the Occupy movements and you ask them what are their demands, they are reticent to answer and rightly so, because they are essentially crafting a point of view from many disparate sources. And one of the striking features of the movement has simply been the creation of cooperative communities—something very much lacking in an atomized, disintegrated society—that include general assemblies that carry out extensive discussion, kitchens, libraries, support systems, and so on.

(Chomsky 2012, 56–57)⁹

This is a perfect example of masses coming together for one purpose only to discover both new purposes and the non-instrumental value of creative political activity. This is what Chomsky means when he refers to “crafting a view from many disparate sources” (united as they were in at least a basic focus on the problems associated with capitalism) as well as the striking feature that was the creation of cooperative communities. Occupy, from its earliest days, served as an alternative to liberal society—it created parallel power structures. None of this was done according to some pre-decided formula; rather, Chomsky notes that, for the occupiers, “There is no single way of doing it. There is no one answer” (Chomsky 2012, 75). One could see this as another entry into the organization vs. spontaneity debates of the early 20th century. However, as was pointed out in Dunayevskaya’s writings on dialectics and on Rosa Luxemburg, these debates missed the main point of the conversation—the power of masses as Reason.

If the strength of Occupy was its insistence on avoiding divisive issues in favor of presenting a united front of the 99%, this was also one of its greatest weaknesses. This became most clear on racial issues that were either ignored or suppressed by many within the movement. Joel Olson notes that while diversity is the strength of Occupy, left colorblindness is the suppression of diversity and is in fact the largest internal threat to the Occupy movement (Olson 2012, 50). Left colorblindness within the Occupy movement introduces Enlightenment universalism into the movement—placing the white male experience in the center while treating all other experiences as abnormal deviations. This type of critique was also espoused by those

involved with Occupy Oakland who, in late October, proposed a memorandum that would officially change the name from Occupy Oakland to Decolonize Oakland (Gould, Gali, Gomez, and DeAsis 2011). The potential renaming served as a reminder of the already existing occupation of Chochenyo Ohlone land as well the police occupation of communities of color and military occupations abroad.¹⁰ Furthermore, it served as a call to action—just as Occupy Wall Street was a command, so was Decolonize Oakland—not just a change of name. This was a command to decenter white experience, to strive for racial justice, and to counter state power with community power. Ultimately, the proposal did not pass, but the experience pushed Occupy Oakland (and other Occupy groups around the country) to actually grapple with the colonial, racist history of occupation in the United States. George Ciccariello-Maher finds a particularly Jamesian element to the Decolonize Oakland movement in the dialectical moment of self-discovery through autonomous, creative activity (Ciccariello-Maher 2012, 42). It was in coming together and being confronted by a diverse movement (covered up as it was by white colorblindness) for social justice that these individuals were able to articulate their own desires and demands.

Barbara Epstein's discussion of Occupy Oakland in the *Socialist Register* (2013) offers up a different critique of the movement that points out the implicit vanguardism involved in some insurrectionist–anarchist tactics. One of few scholarly accounts to take anarchism within the Occupy movement seriously, her article calls into question the fetishization of ultra-militant, confrontationalist forms in a nuanced fashion. While she ultimately reduces what she views as the problem to a dichotomy of resistance and change,¹¹ the type of assessment she offers is an important example of the type of critical intellectual work that ought to be done in conversation with these emerging movements. Strategically, Epstein's article can be viewed as helpful for understanding the movement in relation to state power, public perception, and global capitalism. Furthermore, this type of exploration is capable of overcoming the issues of vanguardism and spontaneism because of its dialogical nature. It is here that an emphasis on James and Dunayevskaya's understandings of dialectics is important. By bringing forward the relationship between categories such as resistance and change, there is hope of transcending them both. In this way, Epstein's piece provides useful categories as a form of understanding some of the problems with the Occupy movement, while a thoroughgoing dialectical analysis is capable of taking those categories and pushing beyond them. Thus, Dunayevskaya and James offer more than a critique of Epstein's critique; they offer a critique of Occupy itself—hopefully one that will allow for new movements to learn lessons from it.

All three of these movements had one thing in common. They were all sparked by economic factors (particularly the enforcement of austerity measures in the face of the 2008 recession) but quickly incorporated elements of a desire for self-determination in the face of state power. However, what must be remembered is that these three movements developed from particular localities and cultures in order to respond to the universal problems of neo-liberal, globalized capitalism. The particular nature of these responses is important if one desires to understand them outside of pre-determined frameworks and formulas. Instead, by looking toward the particularities present in each of these movements, one avoids abstract universals and is able to draw out new concrete universals for the current epoch. While Marx had the Paris Commune to turn to, and Lenin had the soviets, current scholars are fortunate to have three distinct but related movements to study in order to put forward new conclusions for the present age. It would be easy to turn to abstract categories of popular rule, autonomous self-organization, or the occupation form; it is much more difficult to offer up an answer to the question of why this particular form in this particular moment and what the particular content of this form mean for the possibility of revolutionary change. Further, a critical investigation of the limitations of the occupation form is necessary if the trap of cognition as mere reflection is to be avoided.

Marxist theory is more than capable of working toward answers to these questions. Laclau and Mouffe can speak in generalities of a deeper liberalism; orthodox, scientific Marxism can point toward stagnant universals like workers' control; but it is only in the anti-authoritarian, deeply humanist, and profoundly dialectical Marxism of thinkers like James and Dunayevskaya (although they are surely not alone) that one can look to the movement from practice that is itself a form of theory and actually address the particularities of these movements in universal, philosophical terms. This requires moving beyond standard sociological categories (e.g., "new social movements," "newest social movements") in favor of dialectical understanding.

Furthermore, this requires re-conceptualizing the role of Marxist intellectuals in an anti-vanguardist fashion. This is where James and Dunayevskaya prove so crucial. In *Notes on Dialectics*, James drives home the democratic and radically open nature of dialectical thought. His emphasis on Hegel as a non-teleological thinker of dynamic and contingent reality frees Marxist thinkers from fetishizing static and abstract universal categories. This allows Marxist theory to find its home in these new movements of today. Dunayevskaya's emphasis on absolute negativity should not be taken as an abstract philosophical category but ought to draw thinkers back toward Marx's call for the revolution in permanence (Dunayevskaya 1982, 160). This call is made manifest in Marx's *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875),

and Dunayevskaya argues that it is here that Marx cements the relationship between philosophy and organization.

Dunayevskaya reads the *Critique* not simply as a historical argument against Ferdinand Lassalle or the emerging reformist movement in Germany but as a philosophical treatise as well. The primary value here is a consistently critical position toward existing organizations and a constant search for new seeds of revolution. For Marx in the 1882 preface to the Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto*, this meant rethinking the relationship between advanced and underdeveloped countries (Dunayevskaya 1982, 162). For Marxist theorists today, this might mean critically looking toward these revolutionary movements for inspiration. This could take the form of understanding the content of spontaneous form of popular uprising without reifying the form itself. This requires being critical of those proponents of these movements that seek to make abstract universals of this form. At the same time, it means that Marxist intellectuals must always be looking toward these movements to highlight contradictions as they emerge.

Exploring this relationship between cognition as reflection and vanguardism, between class essentialism and the politics of difference, and between authoritarianism and spontaneism has been one of the main goals of this project. The outcome of such an effort is the dialectical understanding of these apparently oppositional poles as contradictions to be overcome through Marxist theory and practice. This overcoming cannot be predetermined, but it is the role of Marxist intellectuals to engage in such activity in order to move forward and to keep the conversation going, avoiding the dogmatic proclamations of previous incarnations of Marxist leadership.

Conclusions as New Beginnings

The preceding comments should make it clear that this chapter does not serve as a conclusion in the conventional meaning of the word. In the spirit of both James and Dunayevskaya, this chapter ought to be understood as the beginning of something new and larger than both the arguments that it sought to deconstruct and the individual contributions that it brought forward. In, hopefully, true dialectical fashion, this project is concerned with negativity in the absolute sense. Furthermore, it takes the claim of masses as Reason seriously. For these reasons, a few final thoughts are offered up, and they ought to be taken as springboards for moving forward rather than strings to neatly tie this project together into one coherent package.

First, this project has pushed against both a post-Marxist position that ultimately falls back onto a liberal identity politics (albeit, a radically anti-essentialist version) as well as a scientific version of Marxism that relies

upon irrelevant categories and dogmatic understandings of both Marx's own writing and the nature of capitalism. In order to move beyond the politics of difference that has become the norm in much of political theory, a rigorous engagement with thinkers like Laclau and Mouffe as well as Iris Marion Young and the Hegelian theorists of recognition is needed here; Axel Honneth, Charles Taylor, and Nancy Fraser come to mind. This project has laid the groundwork for such an engagement to take place in order to construct a critical Marxist understanding of the meaning of difference in our own political practices.

Second, very little work was done in this project to envision a post-revolutionary society. While Marx himself was careful to avoid so-called blueprints for the future, Dunayevskaya reminds us that theory cannot be picked up along the way and that one of the most important questions to be asked is "What happens after a revolution?" Because of this, it is crucial to push forward and attempt to forge an understanding of the negation of the negation in light of contemporary revolutionary politics. Marx saw the future society in embryo in the Paris Commune, and it is the responsibility of theorists today to offer that same sort of analysis of Tahrir Square, Occupy Wall Street, and myriad other moments of revolutionary fervor.

Finally, even as this book has come to completion, new movements have emerged that seek to confront American white supremacy head on. Under the motto that "Black Lives Matter," these movements have primarily focused on racialized police brutality and murder; however, they have also taken on a more holistic understanding of what it means to make the claim that Black lives matter. While these movements have not been discussed in the present book, the anti-essentialist understanding of revolutionary subjectivity and radically democratic conception of politics established in the preceding chapters offers up a way to push Marxist theory forward in light of these recent events.

It is my hope that this book has served as more than an exercise in intellectual history or as a series of theoretical arguments against a particular position. Rather, as these concluding paragraphs suggest, I hope that these arguments point a way forward for theorists and activists (both within and outside of the academy) in light of the conditions of the early 21st century.

Notes

- 1 It is true that Laclau and Mouffe argue for the transformative aspect of political activity, but they do very little to explain how this plays out once these struggles become reified through state action (or inaction). To put it another way, the position advanced in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* rejects essentialism while

ultimately falling back on an essentializing conception of state power regardless of any claims made about radical democracy or rejection of Enlightenment conceptions of subjectivity.

- 2 Žižek's reasoning for returning to Lenin is based on the notion that it is in Lenin that the Marxist tradition successfully encounters an unforeseen situation in a dialectical manner. Clearly, as James and Dunayevskaya argue, the possibility for such an encounter is established in Hegel and Marx's own writings and in the nature of the dialectic itself. Chapter two contains a thorough discussion of Marx's own dialectical encounter with the Paris Commune.
- 3 In this way, Hardt and Negri find themselves in a similar position to Laclau and Mouffe. Despite the rhetorical differences, both sets of authors fall back on an ultimately reactionary position that is cut short at the first negation. Hardt and Negri's list of demands for rights at the end of *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000, 396–407) and Laclau and Mouffe's plea to strengthen liberal democratic institutions are but two examples of the prevailing attitude found in both works. While it represents a dramatically more just and equitable version of liberalism, this attitude still relies upon the state as the entity to whom demands are made and the avenue through which they are realized.
- 4 One could argue that John Holloway makes an identical argument in his *Change the World without Taking Power* (2002). Holloway does indeed rely upon this distinction of types of power in this work. In doing so, Holloway draws upon the Marxist tradition rather than Day's preferred anarchist tradition. Unlike Dunayevskaya and James, Holloway rejects Lenin wholesale. For this reason, Dunayevskaya and James are viewed as offering a more complex and nuanced discussion of Critical Marxism than Holloway does. Without Lenin's contributions to Marxist understandings of Hegelian thought, the type of analysis offered by Dunayevskaya and James would not be possible. Thus, Holloway's discussion of power (informed as it is by the Marxist conception of fetishism) is important, but his treatment of Lenin avoids the difficult question of Marxism's relationship to Hegel.
- 5 This is not to say that Day's discussion of these social movements is not illuminating or that he is providing some sort of ahistorical analysis of these movements; rather, this act of temporal categorization reifies, rather than critically interrogates, existing paradigms. Regardless, this is perhaps a stylistic demand of academic writing, and any criticism of it is made cautiously. The main impetus here is to push off from Day's own project in order to understand contemporary social movements through the framework established throughout this project.
Furthermore, none of these movements can be understood as either purely hegemonic or purely affinitive in nature. Day readily admits this, but the temporal categorization scheme, inherited from Laclau and Mouffe among others, seems to gloss over these nuances in favor of clear analytical distinctions. A main criticism here might be that both of these issues reveal a static and profoundly undialectical approach that only serves to limit Day's own analysis.
- 6 Clearly, this is a contentious point to make. It could be argued that other groups, be they the indigenous peoples of the Americas or inhabitants of sub-Saharan Africa, occupy this position of the supreme Other. That said, Dabashi, inspired in good measure by both Said and Foucault, argues that the proximity of the Orient and frequency of interactions between Occident and Orient allowed for the Western discourse of Otherness that surrounds the Muslim world.
- 7 This is not to say that the success or failure of any revolutionary social movement ought to be measured solely in these terms. When popular protests (whatever potential they might have) are crushed or co-opted, one can hardly refer them as successful. Instead, the victory being mentioned here is a sort of

proto-victory—one that is a necessary condition for the overturning of existing social conditions. Without oppressed subjectivities becoming self-aware as creative agents (becoming a “class for itself” in Marxist parlance), there is no possibility of revolutionary activity. Without this awareness, reform movements and vanguards exist, but revolutionary social movements do not. Another way of phrasing this would be to suggest that this awareness is crucial for the merely political revolution to become the fully social revolution.

- 8 The bill can be read in its entirety here: <https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/2011/related/acts/10.pdf>
- 9 It is important to note here that Chomsky refers to a point of view being crafted. This ought to be distinguished from the disparateness of identity politics that refuses this unifying and creative action. It should also be differentiated from any essentialist conceptions of true consciousness or class interests. For Laclau and Mouffe, disparateness and fragmentation can never be overcome without hegemonic and potentially authoritarian politics. What Chomsky is talking about here with the concept of a point of view is mass activity that attempts to speak toward particular issues (e. g., wealth inequality or alienation under capitalism) from a variety of subject positions. Day’s use of affinity is probably closer to Chomsky’s position than any notion of hegemony attributed to the Marxist tradition by Laclau and Mouffe.
- 10 It is also possible to trace this move back to Maoist third worldism, but none of the groups involved explicitly pointed to such an influence.
- 11 This move can be read as reifying and non-dialectical, but that could perhaps be too harsh of a judgment to make when it comes to a critique of social movements as they emerge. Even so, the application of dialectical understanding of these contradictions would be helpful in order to flesh out even more of the issues associated with Occupy Oakland or ultra-leftist politics in general.

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